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The reality of lawlessness, or the Syndrome of Nicholas II

Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev, General Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, and Margaret Thatcher, the Prime Minister of England, were sitting in the cozy living room of the Prime Minister's residence in White Hall, having, as the official minutes say, a conversation "face to face".

The living room, furnished in the spirit of the Victorian era, contributed to a frank exchange of views between these two prominent political figures who controlled global world processes in the 80s of the XX century.

Gorbachev and Thatcher met both officially and privately for the first time. But already from their first meeting in 1984, when Gorbachev was neither General Secretary nor President, Thatcher, despite all her militant anti-communism, admitted: "You know, I like him. You can deal with him."

And things "went", amazing the world with their unusualness and unpredictability. Open-minded, fairly well educated (two diplomas!), with a touch of provincialism that gave him additional charm, Mikhail Gorbachev bore little resemblance to his reinforced concrete predecessors, reminiscent of lifetime monuments to himself, with which one could do business only by constantly increasing the number and power nuclear warheads. People like Mikhail Gorbachev always appear on the eve of the collapse of great empires that have degraded ahead of time under the burden of their orthodox militancy and want to die in peace and quiet. Understanding this, along with the charm inherent in the seventh general secretary and the first president of the agonizing Stalinist empire, melted the iron hearts of Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan and many other Western politicians who are making every effort to finally end the "Evil Empire".

The "new thinking" and "transition to universal values" declared by Gorbachev were still making their way in weak streams through the cracks and cracks of the rotten "Iron Curtain", threatening, however, soon to turn into a powerful stream capable of washing away even the traces of bloody and long communist rule. All the leaders of the Western world were breathtaking from the opening prospects. All the more so because, as usual, only loans were required from them as reciprocal concessions, that is, money that the CPSU, morally almost ready to leave the world political stage, greedily stuffed into its bottomless pockets in the name of its own bright future. Loans in the form of invoices, reminiscent, if you do not take into account the huge amounts, hotel bills, were provided for specific services:

- so much for the creation of a multi-party system;

- so much for publicity;

- so much for the law on the press;

- so much for the release of political prisoners;

so much for freedom of speech, assembly and association. Total ... It turned out a little!

- All right, withdraw your troops from the Baltics and give the republics independence.

- How many?
- So many.
- Good but not enough. We want more.
- Withdraw troops from Eastern Europe and primarily from Germany. (Here it is, "new thinking"!).
- Fine. How many?

"We have never seen such a manic thirst for self-destruction," intelligence, in particular, the British, reported to their governments. "All the actions of Gorbachev and his team must inevitably lead to the collapse of not only the communist system, but also the Soviet Union as a state."

It was a fantasy that was hard to believe even theoretically. "The totalitarian police empire created by Stalin was a kind of masterpiece," the newspapers wrote. "A masterpiece cannot be improved. Nothing can be added to a masterpiece, just as nothing can be taken away from it. Khrushchev removed terror from the "masterpiece", and everything began to rock. Gorbachev wants to add freedom to the masterpiece and everything will surely fall apart." "In fact," concluded the influential Financial Times, "we are simply buying the Soviet Empire like a cake, which we will then be free to cut into as many pieces as we wish."

But the main goal was to achieve the collapse of the entire communist system, including the Soviet Union, in such a way that under their ruins, stuffed with an unthinkable amount of nuclear and non-nuclear weapons, all of humanity would not die.

Financing is a very important element of any enterprise, and yet concrete work under a huge, shaky vault, ready to collapse at any moment, is no less important, moreover, dangerous. And Gorbachev has so far coped with this work with brilliance. And therefore he had the right to small whims, which, as a rule, were satisfied. Either he suddenly wanted to speak before the US Congress, then before both houses of the English Parliament, then to dine in a closed club of billionaires, where even presidents were not allowed, then to receive some documents from the Vatican archive, then to get Scythian gold earrings from the Hermitage collection, sold in Stalinist times for five pounds sterling, and now estimated at a million. Everyone grimaced, was perplexed, sometimes even indignant, but agreed that this was a meager price for a bloodless victory in the third world war. And although the whims of the last communist leader could not always be satisfied easily and quickly, he was met halfway.

And now Margaret Thatcher's eyebrows shot up in surprise when Gorbachev expressed his new desire: he wants to become the first Soviet leader to be received by the Queen of England, Her Majesty Elizabeth II. It is very important, Mikhail Gorbachev explained, for the USSR to see that the highest and most respected figures of the West changed their attitude towards the Moscow rulers within the framework of the new thinking, and this would mark the beginning of a new era in the history of mankind. That is why he asks Mrs. Thatcher to assist him in the fulfillment of this desire, which is not at all his whim, but an important political necessity for raising his rating in his homeland.

The very fact that the communist leaders began to care about their own image in their country was something fundamentally new. Before, they didn't care at all. Their rating was determined by the Propaganda and Agitation Department under the Central Committee of the CPSU.

Thatcher promised to find out the opinion of Buckingham Palace on this matter, although, to be honest, she did not want to do this at all.

The relationship between the two women, one of whom was nominally considered the head of state, and the second, as the head of the Tory party that won the election, ruled this state, was complex. And unnecessarily, outside the framework of the ceremonial protocol developed over the centuries, it is not customary to disturb the august persons with requests that are not of national importance. But can such a desire of the head of a mighty communist empire be considered a matter of no importance for Great Britain? As the unforgettable William Pitt said, Britain has neither eternal friends nor eternal enemies, but only eternal interests.

Some time later, Gorbachev's plane bound for the United States made an intermediate landing at Breeze Norton, the Royal Air Force Base, where he had a new, albeit brief, meeting with Margaret Thatcher. The prime minister, without waiting for questions from Mikhail Gorbachev, recounted the opinion of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II: "She made a promise to herself not to receive any of the Soviet leaders, because she believes that on their hands is the unwashed blood of her great-uncle, the last Russian Emperor Nicholas II, brutally murdered by order of Lenin in 1918, along with his family.

The most august family was killed in a barbaric way, the cruelty was deepened by the fact that the most august martyrs were denied a Christian burial. No one still knows where the remains of the holy martyrs lie, for, as is known, the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia canonized them as saints. However, Her Royal Majesty is well aware that Mikhail Gorbachev, although indirectly responsible for the crimes committed by bloody murderers, is nevertheless doing everything possible to return Russia to the bosom of Christianity, introducing instead of the ideology of class struggle the ideology of universal values.

Therefore, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is ready to receive the President of the USSR, but asks him to first fulfill one request - to rebury the ashes of the last Russian tsar and his family from the secret place where he now rests, in the tomb consecrated by the Christian rite, where she, the queen, during of her visit to the USSR, could lay flowers, finally put an end to this matter, and thereby crush the bloody barrier with which Soviet Russia fenced itself off from the rest of the world back in 1917.

Queen Elizabeth II is the direct granddaughter of the English King George V, cousin of Nicholas II. Therefore, she had every right to make such statements without risking being accused of gross interference in the internal affairs of the Soviet Union.

Gorbachev listened, nodding his head, smiling. And then he said that he would be glad if all his problems could be solved as easily as this one.

The queen's wish will be fulfilled in the very near future.

Margaret Thatcher assured that she would bring M. Gorbachev's answer to the attention of Her Royal Majesty.

Chapter 1

I

Mikhail Gorbachev rarely forgot anything. With the absurd centralization of power in the Soviet Union, everything from strategic planning to the production of thread could only be decided with his personal permission or with his approval. And if he nevertheless lost sight of something, or problems under the pressure of the circumstances introduced

receded into the background, he was reminded of the forgotten by numerous referents and assistants, who existed precisely for this purpose.

Obtaining an audience with the Queen of England could not be considered a whim of the former Stavropol combine operator, who in this way wanted to once again satisfy his provincial vanity and internally decomplex. In the complex and dangerous game that Gorbachev played, both inside the agonizing USSR and abroad, the Queen's reception could serve as an excellent recommendation that would open many doors for him that were still tightly closed.

The queen's conditions seemed simply ridiculous. How much attention is paid in the West to conventions, etiquette, which in the country of victorious socialism have long forgotten to think about. Although, of course, some measures will have to be taken in order to prepare the comrades (he almost thought "public opinion" - here it is, the pernicious influence of the West!) To some change in views on the last Russian Tsar-Autocrat Nicholas the Bloody, mired in drunkenness and debauchery, executed by the verdict of the people after the Great October Socialist Revolution. All this must be done quietly, entrusting the work to the comrades in charge of the Church. True, under the conditions of perestroika and glasnost, it may be necessary to give a brief statement in the press: so, they say, and so, in order to final national reconciliation, the Central Committee decided (or better not even the Central Committee, but the Council of Ministers) to rebury the remains of the former tsar, well, the like.

Gorbachev himself, like many others, knew little about the last tsar. And to be honest, I didn't know anything at all, except for the very fact of the existence of a Russian autocrat, since Soviet historical science reported sparingly about the last two reigns, combining information under one heading "The Crisis of Autocracy". The works spoke mainly about the great deeds of Vladimir Ilyich in the struggle against the autocracy, nothing could be deducted about the autocrats themselves. However, for the study of someone's biographies, there are bodies that have long been called "competent".

When advancing to the sky-high party-nomenklatura heights along the steep and slippery clan-mafia ladder from dirt and blood, you will forget your own biography, let alone study someone else's.

Gorbachev recalled the "tsarist" question at one of the meetings in the Kremlin, looking at the dull and dull face of the KGB chairman, General Vladimir Kryuchkov. Under normal circumstances, God forbid, he could only rise to the rank of head of the 1st department at some semi-closed enterprise. But the capricious fate that sucked Kryuchkov into Komsomol work in his youth raised him to unprecedented heights thanks to the benevolence of the unforgettable Yuri Andropov, who liked to surround himself with dull personalities in order to better look at their gray background.

Looking at Kryuchkov, Gorbachev painfully recalled what he wanted to entrust him with, since it is not at all easy to chair a meeting of the Politburo and remember something while this.

Finally, he remembered, and when everyone was leaving, he asked Kryuchkov to stay a minute. He was not at all surprised, just like everyone else, since most of the intimate conversations of all the general secretaries without exception took place precisely with the chiefs of the secret political police, no matter how it was called over the past seventy years: Cheka, OGPU, NKVD or KGB.

"Vladimir Alexandrovich," Gorbachev said, noting something on a loose-leaf calendar on his desk, "I will have such an assignment for you ...

An expression of full readiness appeared on Kryuchkov's face to carry out any order of the General Secretary of the party, the combat detachment of which was considered entrusted to him.

department.

Recently, the KGB has literally flooded the secretary general's office with top secret reports, orientations and reports of its analysts, who, according to the proud statement of Kryuchkov himself, constitute the "intellectual elite of the nation." In all these documents, the alarm sounded alarm about the intensification of anti-Soviet and anti-communist activities of various formal and informal "groups", fueled and even directly funded by Western intelligence services. First of all, of course, the US CIA. Kryuchkov informed the president about the presence on the territory of the USSR of a huge number of so-called Western "agents of influence", whose name was legion, conjuring the Secretary General to take strict measures against them before it was too late.

Kryuchkov's people, working around the clock, compiled lists of "agents of influence", entered their names into computers in order to start printing out at the first movement of Gorbachev's eyebrows. To his horror, Kryuchkov learned that the enemy had even infiltrated the Politburo, where at least two paid CIA agents, Yakovlev and Shevardnadze, were standing next to Gorbachev.

The competent authorities were ready at any moment to begin "cleansing measures" to save the "motherland and socialism" in the name of a new rallying of the people around the Leninist Central Committee and the continuation of the victorious march towards communism.

Therefore, when Gorbachev asked Kryuchkov to linger, he gladly decided that the assignment with which Gorbachev wanted to make him happy would at least be connected with the repeal of the anti-state law on the press.

- The question is very delicate, - continued Gorbachev, - And its solution will require ...

As it often happened to him, the General Secretary failed to complete the proposal he had begun, inserted his famous "so to speak" and added, lowering his voice: "... a minimum of publicity."

Kryuchkov nodded eagerly. His department has always specialized in "delicate matters", from the "quiet" liquidation of someone to the delivery of money across several borders of some semi-underground communist party or terrorist organization somewhere in the middle of nowhere.

"I'll ask you," Gorbachev sighed for some reason, "to send a brigade of employees to Sverdlovsk. There, contact local comrades, exhume the remains of the former tsar, deliver them to Moscow and wait for further orders.

- The king? General of the Army Kryuchkov asked in confusion. - What king?

"We know which one," Gorbachev laughed. Our last king. Well, who was shot after the revolution. Remember?

An expression of complete bewilderment reigned on the face of the KGB chairman.

"But," he began hesitantly, "everything was demolished there. There was a special resolution of the Politburo at the request of comrades from the Sverdlovsk Regional Committee. To stop the unhealthy interest of citizens and various rumors ...

- What was taken down? Gorbachev did not understand.

"Well, that's it," continued Kryuchkov, turning purple from the effort. - Well, this house ... How is it? Where did he live before the execution? They took it down, Mikhail Sergeevich.

- What's the deal with the house? - the general secretary began to get angry. "I'm not talking about the house. I say: grave, exhume the remains and bring them here.

- Where is he buried? Kryuchkov asked, still hoping that the General Secretary was joking.

Are you asking me? Gorbachev was finally angry. - You should know this, your department buried.

Kryuchkov was a timid man and never liked to aggravate relations with his superiors. Seeing that, Gorbachev begins, if not to get angry, then to become very irritated, he only asked how urgently all this needs to be done?

"As soon as possible," Gorbachev ordered, "and report the results to me immediately.

Kryuchkov returned to the Lubyanka in the same state of bewilderment that had seized him in the General Secretary's office. At such a time, the head of state has nothing else to do but to look for the royal remains. I wonder why? I wanted to ask, but I didn't dare. The KGB should not ask anything, it should know everything itself or catch it from a half-word. Memory told Kryuchkov that such cases had already happened. I remember that after the war, Stalin, having heard rave reviews about the Russian three-line rifle of the 1895 model, with which the soldiers fought the Russian-Japanese and two world wars, ordered a monument to its inventor, the tsarist captain Mosin, to be erected on the grave. They leaned in, it was, to quickly fulfill the order of the generalissimo, and then it turned out that Mosin, having become a general, was buried in the aisle of the cathedral in the city of Sestroretsk, near Leningrad. The cathedral, of course, was demolished to the foundation a long time ago, and all the graves near it, too. The wasteland was asphalted and a statue of Lenin was installed in its center.

But the order of Comrade Stalin had to be carried out, or be ready to die, and not always a quick death, which, of course, no one wanted. What started here! They rummaged through all the old plans for burials in the cathedral, they found an old man in the area who once worked in it, looked after the graves, they plowed the entire square, surrounding the fence, crushing the asphalt, even removed Lenin with a crane (temporarily, of course). And what do you think - found! General Mosin lay in his coffin as if alive, almost incorruptible. The old man immediately recognized him, after which he was sent back to the zone.

And the search, also on Stalin's orders, for the grave of Georgy Saakadze, is terrible to remember! Three Chekists died, two were imprisoned.

True, times are different now. Rampant democracy, perestroika, glasnost! But this did not affect the organs. Die, but follow the order of the party, and even more so of the General Secretary. Even if you don't understand the essence or meaning of this order.

Kryuchkov summoned the acting head of the 5th Main Directorate of the KGB, General Klimov.

Klimov, like Kryuchkov, advanced under Andropov and thanks to him. The late chairman of the KGB, the first and last Chekist who became General Secretary and died in action, was commemorated in the system with less reverence than Felix Dzerzhinsky. But Dzerzhinsky was there a long time ago, and no one really knew anything about him. And with Andropov, almost all the now leading comrades, both in the KGB and in the Central Committee, one might say, worked together, talked, received instructions, and simply saw him. And this is not enough. Dzerzhinsky was also seen every day on the square in front of the Directorate. He stood to his full height in his legendary overcoat, so monumental, as befits a founding father. But cast iron, of course, is not something that is alive.

Colonel Klimov was selected by Andropov for a special group that acted under the personal control of the General Secretary, and was subordinate only to him. Nobody knew what they were doing there, not even General Chebrikov, the then chairman of the KGB. At the same time, Klimov remained deputy head of the 5th main department. After Andropov's death

Klimov worked under the personal supervision of the new general secretary and was "inherited" by Mikhail Gorbachev, moving from deputy head of the 5th Directorate to acting head, reporting, of course, to Kryuchkov.

Kryuchkov did not like such organizational disorder, although he did not have the slightest desire (unlike some others) to know what Klimov's group was doing. Many years of experience convinced Kryuchkov that it is better not to get involved in transcendental affairs without an invitation, and if invited, then show more caution and less curiosity here. "The less you know, the more you live" - this truth, which has already become banal, has long been known to the state security. Since the execution of Lavrenty Pavlovich, the leaders of the KGB instinctively strove to know as little as possible in order to be worthy to die a natural death. Only Andropov broke this rule, the kingdom to him, the martyr, is heavenly! True, once, while receiving regular instructions from Gorbachev, Kryuchkov hinted about Klimov: "They say, if he works with you, Mikhail Sergeevich, then someone should be appointed to the 5th Directorate, after all - the fight against enemy ideology in all its manifestations, from Zionism to Krishnaism. And then Klimov disappears for months somewhere, his nominal boss, General Dobrovolsky, has been on academic leave for the third year already - he is writing his doctoral dissertation.

But Gorbachev at the same time looked at Kryuchkov in such a way that he decided not to develop this topic further. "Let them do whatever they want." But he decided to shift Gorbachev's order to Klimov. First, this is a direct matter of the 5th Directorate. "It's not for him to dig out these bones himself!" And secondly, let the Secretary General and his favorites deal with this matter, since he has nothing else to do now!

General Klimov came to the office of the chairman of the KGB, as always, elegant, in an expensive foreign suit, youthful, smelling of a bouquet of some kind of Parisian cologne and expensive cognac. Kryuchkov looked at him unfriendly: "upstart." He owes his entire career to the fact that he was born in the Stavropol region and held an insignificant Komsomol post there, but he liked his fellow countryman Andropov. And now look - already a general. And I would have pulled the strap in Stalin's times, as Kryuchkov and all the senior comrades had to.

Klimov, after listening to Kryuchkov, laughed:

"The English are cheating on Gorbachev, Vladimir Alexandrovich," he explained to Kryuchkov, "the queen is our tsar's granddaughter." So he wants to knock out one more brick from our foundations in this way.

"You and I, Comrade Klimov," Kryuchkov reacted dryly, "it's not supposed to reason like that. There is a direct instruction to the first one (Kryuchkov emphasized the word "direct") to deal with this matter, and I ask you to accept this for execution. Report to me personally.

Klimov shrugged.

"Why are we doing this business? - he asked. — Contact Sverdlovsk. Let the local comrades do everything and deliver the remains to Moscow. They will also be happy - there is a reason to appear in the capital, to fly at public expense.

Klimov, even in the KGB, was famous as a cynic.

Kryuchkov wanted to reprimand Klimov that he did not need his advice, he received the order and let him contact whomever he considers necessary in order to fulfill this order "exactly and on time."

But instead, he obediently picked up the handset of a special government telephone and connected with the KGB Directorate for Sverdlovsk and the Sverdlovsk Region. There was still

early in the morning, none of the leadership was on site, but the duty officer for the local government knew the service: he quickly and deftly switched the phone to the apartment of the head of the KGB, Colonel-General Baturin.

Baturin went to the big bosses from the army special departments, and therefore was concise and understanding in a military way.

"I wish you good health, Comrade General of the Army," he greeted Kryuchkov at length, in order to wake up and figure out what was what. A call from Moscow, and even from Kryuchkov himself, is a serious matter, especially in the Sverdlovsk region, which is one big secret military-industrial zone.

Kryuchkov, in his dull, monotonous voice, explained to Baturin the essence of the matter.

From the painful silence that reigned on the other end of the government communications line, it was clear that the general could not get his head around the problem. Apparently, he was wondering if everyone in the Lubyanka had gone crazy.

"So you understood me?" Kryuchkov asked into the phone.

"That's right," replied Baturin, "I understand you, Comrade Chairman." I report: the burial is known, but it was not us who did all this, but the Ministry of Internal Affairs. And they have all the documents on this issue. Ever since the people's commissariats split in 1941. They have a colonel there. I forgot my last name...

- Where exactly? asked Kryuchkov.

"In Moscow, with you," continued Baturin, "the Colonel dealt with these matters, how was he?" I will check and let you know.

"Good," the KGB chairman sighed and hung up.

"The Ministry of Internal Affairs, it turns out, was engaged in this," Kryuchkov said to Klimov. - There is a colonel there who kept this issue under control. Baturin promised to clarify his last name. So you can say it's done. Let them deliver these bones to Gorbachev. And you just control. You might think we don't have much to worry about...

At that moment, the emergency phone beeped. Disciplined General Baturin from Sverdlovsk, finally waking up, quickly found out everything from his well-trained adjutants.

"Ryabchenko is the name of this colonel," said Kryuchkov, hanging up the phone, "Ryabchenko, Radiy Trifonovich. I don't remember anything like that. What department on Ogareva is doing this?

— Ryabchenko? Klimov was surprised this time. — Radiy Ryabchenko? Screenwriter?

What screenwriter? Kryuchkov did not understand.

- Have you watched the serial film "Daughter of the Revolution"? - Klimov reminded, - so this is according to his scenario. Only he seems to have been kicked out of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Some revelations started working in print.

"I didn't like the film," Kryuchkov admitted, "it turns out that the police did everything after the revolution, and not us. During the Antonov rebellion, what kind of police was there? Four drunken precinct officers, and even those ran to Antonov. All the Chekists did, but you'll see with him, that's how the police only worked ...

II

Arriving home, General Klimov called Gorbachev. He was one of the few who had a direct connection with the Secretary General.

"So he entrusted this matter to you," Gorbachev laughed, "I knew it. Old but cunning.

Klimov spoke about Colonel Ryabchenko.

— Is that how? the general secretary was surprised. - Great. Only I will ask you, Viktor Ivanovich, talk to him personally. Warn that there is no publicity yet. I myself will instruct when this information is sent to the press. You just find out that there is no forgery. The matter is very important. Even more important than you imagine. I would never stir up this question if I did not consider it extremely important at the present stage of perestroika. I hope to meet you in Brussels next week. We'll talk in more detail there. But keep the whole thing under your control.

After talking with the president, Klimov called the duty officer of the 5th Department and ordered tomorrow at 14:00 to call citizen Ryabchenko R.T. to him.

The apparatus of General Klimov knew the service. Therefore, when the general appeared in his office at about 11 a.m. the next day, he already had a certificate with a brief biography of a retired police colonel on his desk: "Ryabchenko Radiy Trifonovich, was born in Moscow in 1932. Father - from the peasants, mother - from the workers. After graduating from high school, he entered the Moscow Law Institute. After graduating, he worked for a long time in the apparatus of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, mainly engaged in public relations and propaganda of police heroics.

Author of several books and screenplays on the topic of the exploits of the police. Since 1975 he has been a member of the Union of Cinematographers. Scriptwriter of the film "Daughter of the Revolution". In 1988, in the magazine "Youth" No3, he published an article "How many faces does the police have?", Where he suddenly began to expose the order prevailing in the police, which he had been singing for so many years. In the same year, he was dismissed from the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

Exactly at two o'clock in the afternoon, the selector on Klimov's desk said in the pleasant voice of an ensign-secretary: "Viktor Ivanovich, Comrade Ryabchenko is in the waiting room."

I must say that Klimov did not like the former police colonel at first sight. He was somehow all over, from anxious shifting eyes to a graying mustache, coyly fake: the mustache, although it was undoubtedly his own, but very much resembled a fake one.

Nevertheless, Klimov did nothing to let the newcomer feel his attitude, on the contrary, he left his desk, honored Ryabchenko with an excellently polite handshake, which was not typical of him.

"We took the liberty of disturbing you, Radiy Trifonovich," began Klimov, "because we need help. We hope you will not refuse us.

"Post for honor," the retired police colonel gracefully nodded his head.

"Great," said Klimov, "we learned that you, on your own initiative, found the burial place of the remains of the former Tsar Nicholas II and his family. What sparked your interest in this issue?

- I would not say that I acted solely on my own initiative, - slightly

Ryabchenko blushed, "although I won't deny that this question has really always interested me. But I started taking concrete actions on behalf of my leadership.

— Shchelokova? Klimov asked.

"This is a complicated story," Ryabchenko avoided a direct answer. Basically, it all started by accident. I once came to Sverdlovsk on behalf of the Ministry of Internal Affairs to talk with the personnel of the Sverdlovsk police department about my film "Daughter of the Revolution" and, taking the opportunity, asked me to arrange a tour of the so-called Ipatiev House, where Nicholas II was shot.

- For what purpose? Klimov asked. Ryabchenko blushed even more:

— I was told that this house is the main attraction of the city. To be in Sverdlovsk and not visit Ipatiev's house is the same as to be in Moscow and not visit mausoleum.

- Indeed? Klimov was surprised. So why did they demolish this house?

- You represent! Ryabchenko was indignant. "I tried to figure out whose initiative it was, and I couldn't. Guilty, as always, can not be found.

- Guilty? Klimov asked. - However, it doesn't matter. Continue, please. I think it was in 1975.

"Quite right," Radiy Trifonovich confirmed, "precisely in 1975. I stayed at the Sverdlovsk Hotel, and in the morning the local police officers came for me, and we drove to Komsomolskaya Square, where this house was located. Before the war, it was called the Square of People's Revenge ...

- Amazing! Klimov perked up. "Still, you must admit that our fathers had excellent taste. Sorry, I interrupted you. People's Revenge Square, how wonderful it sounds!

"Really, not bad," Ryabchenko agreed. "So, they took me to this mansion. There at that time was some kind of training center for the retraining of teachers, if my memory serves me right. They showed me everything, including the basement, where, in fact, the tsar was shot. There I learned that the famous bullet-riddled wall behind the Romanovs had disappeared. I was told in confidence by the head of the political department of the local police department that this partition is now in England.

— Is that how? Klimov was surprised. - How did she get there?

"I have no idea," Ryabchenko shrugged his shoulders, "and just imagine, Comrade General, when I was walking around the Ipatiev House, I suddenly decided that it was necessary at all costs to find the remains of the tsar and his relatives.

- So suddenly they took it and decided? Klimov asked.

"You know," Ryabchenko smiled, "as they say in bad detective stories, "something seemed to push me." Then I met a local historian, a geologist by profession, to whom I offered to help find the grave of the Romanovs, because only this, even from the point of view of Marxist theory, would allow us to prove and confirm a lot.

"Excuse me," the general interrupted Ryabchenko, "what were you going to prove and confirm? I don't quite understand something.

- Like what? the screenwriter wondered. "All the facts stated in the official history.

Did you have any reason to doubt them? Klimov looked at retired colonel.

- That's not the point, - he blushed again, - I say that something pushed me, I have to find their grave. I can't pinpoint my motivations. There are things that have no explanation...

"So you acted solely on your own initiative," the general clarified, "without any instructions or assignments from your command?" Say, from the same Shchelokov?

"I acted only on personal impulse," Ryabchenko confirmed, "because I considered it my duty, the duty of a Russian person, to find these remains.

"Then what were you going to do with them?" - General Klimov continued to drive the colonel into a corner.

"I don't understand what you want from me," he suddenly bristled. Did I do something illegal?

"You know," said Klimov, "it all depends on how you look at it. Did you know about the decision of the Central Committee of the party on measures to suppress unhealthy rumors in connection with the approaching 60th anniversary of the events in Yekaterinburg? Shchelokov specifically sent you to Sverdlovsk to check everything on the spot before the demolition of the Ipatiev House, what kind of reaction the population might have, and so on. And suddenly you start looking for the remains of the former tsar, although you know very well that the Ipatiev House is to be demolished, that you need to stop the unhealthy and ideologically harmful pilgrimage that was observed near this house in the previous time. All sorts of flowers, notes, collections of various anti-social elements. And in such an environment, you begin to look for a grave, rummage through the special funds of libraries, studying Sokolov, Diderichs and other slanderous literature. I ask you why? Firstly, why are you telling me fairy tales if I have all the reports that you sent to the late Shchelokov. Secondly, why did Shchelokov need the royal remains? I advise you to be frank with me, because this is not a joke and looks much more serious than just a private initiative of an adventurer. I hope you understand me, Radiy Trifonovich? I think that if we make public your role in the demolition of the Ipatiev House...

"Excuse me, Comrade General," said Radiy Trifonovich, "but my role was completely insignificant. Even Shchelokov here was a simple performer. Everything was decided as you know...

"All right, all right," Klimov reassured the colonel, "don't be nervous. They took it down, they took it down. Got excited, as always. No one is going to make you responsible for this. We understand perfectly well that you acted on orders. But why did Shchelokov need the royal remains?

"I don't know," Ryabchenko replied dully.

- Do not know? Klimov asked. - Fine. It doesn't really matter whether you know or not. If you don't know, then I can tell you: Shchelokov wanted to sell the remains of the royal family to the West, if my memory serves me, it seems, for two hundred thousand pounds sterling of some monarchical organization associated with the English royal family. And I received an advance of thirty thousand pounds, of which your activities were partially financed. Is not it?

"I give you my word as a Communist, Comrade General," Ryabchenko said firmly, "I didn't know anything about this. I received an order from Army General Shchelokov to find the burial place of Nicholas II. And the minister instructed me to do this only because he knew me as a person interested in Russian history and ...

"I willingly believe you," Klimov interrupted him amiably. "We know that you are an officer and a communist and, moreover, that you are a decent person. It just surprised me that you started telling me some tales, but I think that you were guided by the secrecy that the late Minister of the Interior surrounded all these events.

With a nod of his head, Ryabchenko made it clear to the Chekist general that this was exactly what happened.

"So, Shchelokov instructed you to find the remains of the royal family," Klimov continued, "so what? Did you find them?

"Yes," Ryabchenko confirmed. — I found them.

- And what happened then? Klimov asked. - Where are they now?

- Then, as you know, Shchelokov got into wild troubles, and he was not up to the royal bones. I found the burial, opened it, but then I buried everything back, marking the place.

- So they lie there, where they lay? Klimov asked.

"Yes, Comrade General," Ryabchenko confirmed.

- Why did you have to look for this burial? Klimov asked. - Isn't the place of burial marked accurately enough in the documents?

"There are many inaccuracies in the documents," he explained. It says that the bodies were dissolved in acid, burned and thrown into the mine. My research has shown that this is not the case. I confess I have been looking for a long time. We started work in 1975, and I found the burial four years later
Later.

- Well, - the general agreed - submit a report on the search and evidence that the burial found is indeed the grave of the royal family, as you assure. Then you and my people will fly to Sverdlovsk and deliver the remains here to me. Are you clear?

"Not exactly," Ryabchenko said after thinking. - I understood from your words, Comrade General, that the late Minister Shchelokov, using my knowledge and experience, tried to drag me into a dangerous crime. I would like to remind you that at the present time I no longer work in the internal affairs system. I am a screenwriter, i.e. in fact, a private individual. And before I carry out this assignment, I want to know if I am being drawn into any illegal action.

- Colonel Ryabchenko, - Klimov sighed, - in order to hide you for the rest of your life in the zone, I would not have to send to the Sverdlovsk region for the remains of the Romanovs, believe me. You were too close to Shchelokov not to know about many of your boss's affairs. But I am not a supporter of such methods. I invited you, dear Radiy Trifonovich, not at all for any kind of revelations, but in order, so to speak, to legalize all your past activities, giving it a state and, if you like, patriotic character. Therefore, all the mistakes you have made in the past, as well as the mistakes you will no doubt make in the future, will find their grave here.

Klimov's thin palm lay on the cover of the clerical folder.

"The point is this," the general continued. - There is an opinion at the top about the expediency of changing the official policy in relation to some aspects of our heroic past, in particular, to the activities and personality of the last king. Of course, no one is going to mold him into a national hero, like Shchors, but the transition to universal human values, as outlined by the party, makes Nikolai's biography very tragic and touching. I think you will agree with me.

Ryabchenko wanted to insert something, but the general stopped him with a wave of his hand:

- Just a minute. Our Party also believes that at the present stage of the country's development it is expedient to increase the role of religious and cult institutions in educating the population and raising the level of public morality, which, you will agree with me, has become exceptionally low in recent years.

Thus, you are like a Russian and, don't be afraid of the word, an Orthodox person." After all, you are Orthodox, I hope? Ryabchenko shrugged.

- I guess I do not know...

Apparently, he did not expect to hear anything like that from the mouth of a KGB general.

- So, - continued Klimov, - you will find the royal burial, but not for the purpose of the criminal intent of the late chief to sell them abroad or somewhere else, but to rebury them according to the Christian rite. You will be given the right and honor of the discoverer. It may be necessary to give a number of lectures to the public, give interviews to foreign correspondents, organize a series of television programs and

other. Do you understand me? Moreover, you do not have to come up with different fairy tales to motivate your actions. But only the first phase of the operation needs to be completed quickly, I mean the delivery of the remains to Moscow. If you know how to count, then you can easily figure out that on the hype around this topic, you can easily earn more than was due from the Shchelokov scam. Percent, I suppose, he offered no more than ten?

"Five," Ryabchenko smiled.

"You see," Klimov smiled in response, "in our version, much broader prospects open up. All publications are copyright, our friendship should be both sincere and secret. Of course, all expenses for the first and partially for the second stage of the operation, not to mention some organizational issues, we undertake. Well, how? Did I manage to convince you?

Ryabchenko was silent, but experience told Klimov that he was sitting in front of a convinced Human.

III

Major Sergei Kumanin worked for the KGB for twelve years, where he came almost immediately after graduating from MGIMO (Moscow Institute of International Relations). His father, Stepan Agafonovich, was a retired lieutenant colonel of the border troops, all his life wandered around different borders, and only after retiring he settled in Moscow. He received a two-room apartment with difficulty, as a war veteran, and not without the help of his friends in the Main Directorate of the Border Troops of the KGB of the USSR. Of course, his father's connections were not enough to get his son into such an elitist and prestigious institution as MGIMO, but chance helped. Once Stepan Agafonovich met his old acquaintance, with whom even before the war he served on the Afghan border Kumanin was then a lieutenant, and he was an ordinary border guard called up from somewhere in the Trans-Urals. The time was hard, vague. Huge territories of Central Asia were controlled by mobile cavalry groups of Tajiks, Turkmen, Uzbeks,

Afghans and Persians, who were collectively called "Basmachis". There were daily skirmishes, skirmishes, negotiations, interspersed with mutual deceptions. Once, on a mountain road, Kumanin, along with this border guard, was ambushed. The horses were killed, and the border guard was seriously wounded. Kumanin dragged him on himself for two days, he himself almost died of thirst, but dragged his comrade to the outpost. He was bleeding, and everyone thought that the end was near. However, no one really cared about that at the time. Died every day. His life was worth a penny, and someone else's - even less.

But we managed to deliver the guy to the hospital, where he was put on his feet, and then sent somewhere to study according to the NKVD system. So he went to the big bosses. Somehow, after the war, at a solemn meeting on the occasion of the next anniversary of the organs of the Cheka, Stepan Agafonovich saw him in the presidium. There was one in civilian clothes, but he was sitting between two lieutenant generals. Kumanin, although he saw, but did not recognize. Kumanin himself, over the long years of service, developed the habit of not reminding himself to his superiors without special need, much less bowing. Therefore, he did not receive a colonel, although for three years before retiring he was in the post of colonel - deputy head of the political department of the border district.

I met my old acquaintance again many years later, when Stepan Agafonovich, already retired, was walking along Gorky Street in Moscow, dressed in full uniform. He was proud of this uniform and often put it on when leaving the "sleeping" area for the center of the capital. Suddenly, someone called out loudly by his last name. Kumanin looked around in surprise and again heard his last name pronounced from the half-open window of the black Volga, which was crouched by the sidewalk in the place where parking was strictly prohibited.

He recognized his old colleague immediately. Got into the car. They remembered the joint service at the border. There was nothing more to remember, and it was not supposed to.

An acquaintance asked if Kumanin needed anything?

He could help, help, say, with housing, with a pension, or a ticket somewhere.

Stepan Agafonovich refused: everything seems to be there, but he has never been greedy. We started talking about children, we agreed that the youth today is not the same. Kumanin's youngest son, Sergei, just finished school this year, and Stepan Agafonovich complained that his son did not want to categorically follow in his father's footsteps, i.e. enroll in a border school. However, and in any other, too. They shook their graying heads in dismay, but then it turned out that Kumanin's old acquaintance is now Vice-Rector of MGIMO for Science. He himself suggested: "Let your Seryozha take a ticket to the district committee of the Komsomol, and I will take care of the rest."

And so it all happened without much trouble. But, when Sergei graduated from the institute, even the patronage of the vice-rector was not enough to get a diplomatic job abroad.

There are many different legends about MGIMO, especially about what a wide road this educational institution opens for its graduates. In fact, after graduation it was possible to get distribution to some provincial school as a teacher of history or a foreign language. Of course, one could immediately get into the secretaries of the embassy in Washington. But these are extremes. And between them there were all kinds of vacancies at the Institute of the USA and Canada, at the Institute of World Economy, in the apparatus of the Central Committee of the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League and, of course, in the KGB.

It was the KGB that was offered to Sergei Kumanin, and he, under some pressure from his father, agreed. Thus, to the great pleasure of Kumanin Sr., continuity was continued, the dynasty, as they liked to say in those years. One way or another, Sergei ended up in the department to which his father devoted his whole life. Unwittingly, Kumanin Jr. became a hereditary Chekist, who constituted something like an aristocratic stratum in

organs. To a certain extent, belonging to this caste contributed to promotion through the ranks. Somehow Sergei decided to find out, probably in order to finally make sure of his tribal nobility, was his grandfather Agathon a Chekist? It turned out he wasn't. Although how to look. Agafon Ivanovich disappeared in the first days of the revolution, having managed to transfer the two-year-old Stepan to the care of some relative in the village. She soon died of typhus, and the five-year-old Stepan was accepted into the good hands of the Bolshevik Party.

There could not have been Chekists in the "third generation", very often this department was "cut out" almost completely, and in harsh times even by entire families. The surviving descendants no longer risked following the path of their deceased parents.

Sergei Kumanin appeared on the Lubyanka in 1979 after graduating from a one-year KGB school in a quiet, closed village near Moscow. Its appearance coincided with the peak of the volcanic activity of Yuri Vladimirovich Andropov, who fought for the ideological purity of the Soviet people and for the cleansing of the Communist Party from the crap brought in from the West, which turned the apologists of the most faithful and advanced teaching in the world into businessmen and money-grabbers of low stature. Andropov intended to burn all this with a red-hot iron to the ground, and then ...

Lieutenant Kumanin began serving in the 5th Main Directorate, known as ideological counterintelligence. Work was above the head. The epochs of Khrushchev's snotty liberalism, and then of Brezhnev's "detente" gave rise to a mass of purulent ulcers on the healthy body of Soviet society, which could not be cured otherwise than with red-hot steel. Kruto were Zionists, dissidents who kept and distributed slanderous literature composed by CIA agents, published with CIA money and distributed on the instructions of the same CIA on the territory of the USSR. They had to carry out searches and mass arrests, confiscate mountains of books, manuscripts, paintings, and later video cassettes. New correctional camp zones were packed to capacity.

Sergey Kumanin ended up in a relatively small unit engaged in the fight against manifestations of Great Russian chauvinism and bourgeois nationalism, having found out, to his great surprise, that there are many different underground groups, although not numerous in composition, professing ideas that can only be called monarchist. The education received by Kumanin with good reason allowed him to be considered equally a historian and a lawyer, even more a historian. Kumanin could not think that anyone could feel nostalgia for such an insignificant person as Nicholas II, the last Russian tsar, who was preserved in historical memory only because he created a revolutionary situation in Russia and, to be honest, it was largely due to own stupidity.

Once Kumanin, at the head of a brigade, raided the apartment of a bearded philosopher, who was listed as such only because, it seems, he had completed three courses at the Faculty of Philosophy of Moscow State University and was expelled for systematic absenteeism and academic failure. This, however, did not prevent him from writing, while working as a watchman, several books on the philosophy of the spiritual crisis of the Slavs and the semi-mystical ways of its revival. The books were published, of course, in the West, and their textual examination, carried out independently by two doctors of philosophy from the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, showed that the author needed psychiatric help. In any case, he should have been isolated from society.

Two cubic meters of books were confiscated from the philosopher. Various Rozanovs, Berdyaevs, Solovyovs, Florenskys and other vicious anti-Soviet and obscurantists, strictly prohibited in the Soviet Union. Kumanin was struck by the fact that on the wall of the room where the philosopher lived, there were portraits of Nicholas II and his evil hangman satrap Stolypin. These were photo reproductions from some pre-revolutionary illustrated publications, enclosed in

cheap modern frames.

During the interrogation, Kumanin told the philosopher that all his nonsense about Slavic philosophy betrays a sluggish schizophrenia in him, and asked what made him keep portraits of the two most bloody executioners of the Russian people, whose spiritual revival he was so concerned about? In response, the philosopher laughed. He laughed for a long time, because he was sent to a madhouse, where he died after the first injection of chlorpromazine. It turned out that he had a very weak heart.

The other arrested person was more talkative. He turned out to be a historian, a teacher of scientific communism in one of the Moscow universities. During a search, they found a lot of books and brochures published in the West, dedicated to the life, work and tragic end of the last Russian emperor. He was caught trying to establish contact with a certain Western publishing house, which exists on the money of the CIA, in order to publish his monograph on the history of the last reign.

- What inspired you so much in this last reign, may I ask? Kumanin asked. - By the fact that the workers and peasants of Russia were brought to the brink of poverty, that tsarism, already doomed by history, choked in their blood?

- Well, as for the blood, - the arrested historian suddenly snapped, - the blood that Nikolai shed can be completely ignored compared to the blood that you shed when you came to power.

Who is "you"? Kumanin asked. - You seem to be a member of the party? And you allow me to conduct anti-Soviet propaganda right in my office. For what purpose did you try to popularize the personality of Nikolai? On whose mission?

"I joined the party so as not to be left without a job," the prisoner admitted, "and the personality of the last Russian monarch is worthy of great glory and reverence. You probably know that the Russian Church Abroad canonized him and his entire family as saints - new martyrs.

"I know," Kumanin said, "that the West is doing everything possible to discredit our social system. And they do not disdain at the same time by any means, using morally degraded people like you.

"I think that this is not about my personality," the historian answered, "but about the personality of Emperor Nicholas. I can tell you that not a single Russian tsar inspires as much respect in me as he does. He was the first in the thousand-year history of Russia, who, perhaps, intuitively groped for the path along which the state could go to such distances that no country ever dreamed of. Believe me, he would have done it if not for a series of tragic circumstances that he failed to foresee and for which his predecessors were more to blame than he was.

The historian received three years in prison and a year of exile.

So gradually Kumanin was drawn into the work, voluntarily or involuntarily acquiring knowledge that he did not aspire to, but which themselves "went" to him. The fact is that he had to read the books and manuscripts confiscated during the searches, so that he could legally formulate the indictments. After all, they issued their decision and official warnings, and the courts and took administrative measures.

Of course, it was completely impossible to read everything. But we should not forget that Kumanin graduated from a humanitarian institute and learned to write annotations and synopses without reading the entire source. Make an opinion about the book, say the same Sokolov "Murder

royal family," was no more difficult than taking notes on the materials of the 24th party congress from a thousand-page transcript. So, against his will, Kumanin learned that Nicholas II was an exceptionally educated and polite person, that he spoke several foreign languages, was an excellent family man, dearly loved his wife, four daughters and his only terminally ill son. That the emperor was exceptionally modest (he remained a colonel, because he considered it inconvenient to make himself a general), sincerely believed in God, was to some extent a fatalist, saying in a moment of strong shocks: "God's will for everything." That he was a very hard-working person, studied affairs in the most attentive way, without entrusting them to the clerks, and even managed without a personal secretary. That he was very concerned about education in Russia, patronized the sciences and arts, kept theaters and shelters at his own expense, built churches and cathedrals, loved the army and navy, was a good sportsman: he rode and played tennis very well, went on yachts, kayaks, played towns. He drank very moderately, but smoked a lot. He had kind "gazelle eyes", light brown hair and a light brown beard. He was very easy to communicate with.

Gradually, a unique library dedicated to the personality of Nicholas II and his reign gathered in Kumanin's safe, which was confiscated during searches as "having no right to be kept in private collections." On the one hand, this library was unique, since it consisted of books published in the West in insignificant editions, on the other hand, it clearly indicated how easily any anti-Soviet literature was delivered to the USSR. It was obvious that the connections between Soviet citizens and various anti-Soviet centers abroad were still far from being fully revealed by the Chekists.

The books of Sokolov "The Murder of the Tsar's Family" and Diderikhs (Kolchak's general) "The Murder of the Tsar's Family and Members of the Romanov House in the Urals" were of particular value to the Kumanin Library. There are many other works, practically unknown even to specialist historians who have access to special guards, for example, a monograph by a certain Kobylin "Emperor Nicholas II and Adjutant General M. V. Alekseev" or, say, a viciously anti-Soviet book by some Krivorotov "On the Terrible Way to the Ural Golgotha", or the sanctimonious-pious pamphlet of the émigré priest Alferyev "Emperor Nicholas II as a man of strong will" with the subtitle "Materials for compiling the Life of the Most Pious Tsar-Martyr Nicholas the Great Passion-Bearer".

And what were the works of the self-proclaimed "professor" Paganuzzi, categorically entitled "The Truth About the Murder of the Royal Family", "The Truth About the Crime in Yekaterinburg" and so on – so much "truth"!

Somehow Kumanin counted how many books on this topic had accumulated in his fireproof cabinet, and made sure that there were already 280 of them in Russian alone.

Books dedicated to the personality of the last Russian tsar, oddly enough, were published all over the world. Kumanin even compiled a list of where these "research" were published, a long list of cities: New York, Paris, London, Madrid, Rome, Jordanville, Buenos Aires, San Francisco, Washington, Brussels, Belgrade and even Beijing, Jakarta and Tel Aviv. An ideological noose was looming, which from different directions they tried to throw by any means around the throat of the Soviet Union. All books carried biological anti-communism and completely uncritical apology of Nicholas P. collapse in the First World War, where, by the way, he was the Supreme Commander.

Even the canonization of Nikolai, members of his family and associates, who were shot in the Ipatiev House, was not so much ecclesiastical as anti-Soviet.

All these books emphasized that only criminals, and not political ones, but purely criminal ones, could order the murder of five innocent women and the underage Tsarevich Alexei.

This hysterical campaign, launched on a grand scale by the Western intelligence services on the ideological front, trying to tarnish the Communist Party and the sacred name of its founder, the great Lenin, demanded the most severe response measures. The monarchists were ordered to fight even more severely than the Zionists. Give the deadlines to the fullest and in all cases try to identify the agent network of foreign intelligence services.

The Central Committee of the Party even decided on the expediency of publishing a publication on this topic in the USSR, which, being the author's, would be a semi-official opinion of the Soviet leadership both on the personality of Nicholas II himself and on his fate.

This assignment was proposed to be carried out by the little-known historian and publicist Mark Kasvinov. The result was a book called Twenty-Three Steps Down. It was the author's find, playing on the twenty-three years of the reign of Nicholas II as a staircase with twenty-three steps. Every year, according to the author, Nikolai went down one step until the stairs led him to the basement of the Ipatiev House. The annotation to the book said: "The 23 years of the reign of the last representative of the Romanov dynasty were marked by many serious crimes, and the people pronounced their just verdict on him. The book by M. K. Kasvinov tells about the life and inglorious end of Nicholas the Bloody, gives a worthy rebuff to those bourgeois falsifiers who tried and are trying to present him as an innocent victim. And although the main thing in the work was the selection of evidence that Nicholas II deserved to be shot by all his deeds and deeds, the author could not really say anything for what the entire royal family was shot. Therefore, he made a heroic attempt to "smear" Lenin himself of this crime and blame everything on the arbitrariness of the local, Yekaterinburg, Bolsheviks, who did not want to obey the center. This became almost an official setting.

After some time, Kumanin's group covered a real monarchist center in the Moscow region, numbering three men and two women. The very first interrogations made it clear that the "center" had a connection with Grand Duke Vladimir Kirillovich living in France, who did not hesitate to bear the title of "head" of the Russian Imperial House in exile. The prince - the son of Nicholas II's cousin, the infamous Grand Duke Kirill Vladimirovich - was the tsar's second cousin.

It was with him that the "monarchist center" maintained contact.

The study of the captured documents and the interrogation of the arrested immediately made it clear to the investigator that this was not just about a biased study of history with the aim of spreading deliberately slanderous information discrediting the Soviet state and social system (for which Article 70 of the Criminal Code of the RSFSR was punished), but about the preparation of this monarchical revolution. In other words, it was about the violent overthrow of the existing system in the USSR. This already drew on the 64th article of the Criminal Code, which provides for execution.

The investigation quickly found out that the quiet town near Moscow was, as it were, the center of a web, the threads of which led to the most diverse anti-Soviet centers of Western intelligence services, starting with Radio Liberty and ending with the Society of Russian Orthodox Youth.

In the course of the investigation, the names of career foreign intelligence officers like Prince Golitsin and Shakhovsky surfaced.

A demonstration process was being prepared.

The entire group of investigators was advanced ahead of schedule (Kumanin became a captain) and presented to government awards. But here, like a bolt from the blue, the order of the leadership followed: a criminal case against the "monarchist center" stop, release the defendants on bail and wait for further orders.

All this was so incomprehensible that the head of the group, Lieutenant Colonel Volkov, wanted to find out the details from his superiors.

The authorities did not comment on their order. The general, escorting Volkov out of the office, only sighed, spread his arms and pointed at the ceiling with an eloquent gesture.

The vigorous activity begun in Andropov's time was winding down before our very eyes. The ashes of Yuri Vladimirovich were lowered with all honors into the Kremlin wall, but the desire to continue his work, the work of purifying the people and the party, which, as you know, are united, remained.

The new General Secretary Chernenko did not give any new instructions - either he did not want to, or he did not have time, because he died very quickly. With the advent of his successor, Mikhail Gorbachev, who was greeted with enthusiasm by everyone in the KGB, since it was known that the new general secretary played the second center in the Andropov team, some troubles immediately began.

Lieutenant Colonel Volkov was transferred to the reserve. The question arose: who to appoint as the new commander of the group. No one somehow showed a special desire, which had never been noted before. And Kumanin was appointed commander of the group, although his candidacy, as it were, was not considered due to lack of experience and low military rank.

"Experience is a gain," the authorities decided, "but a title is fixable." And Kumanin became a major.

After that, he began to personally attend the briefings that the curator from the Central Committee of the CPSU conducted with the unit commanders. The curator explained that at this stage, arrests of monarchists should be stopped, searches should be refrained from (at least official ones), open criminal cases should be closed, and henceforth, until further notice, limited to preventive measures.

Preventive conversations for a real Chekist are an empty pastime.

"Will you deny," one of the prophylactic citizens asked Kumanin, "that Pyotr Alexandrovich Stolypin was the greatest Russian statesman?"

"First of all, he was not Alexandrovich, but Arkadievich," Kumanin corrected.

This was such a revelation for the prevented that the conversation had to end.

For a while, Kumanin's group simply did nothing, put the accumulated documents in order, activating the confiscation. Kumanin decided at the same time to activate (that is, write off to the boiler room) the books with which two fireproof cabinets had already been filled. "Processes have stopped, and why the hell are all these books taking up space?" He wrote a corresponding submission, attached an act, where, as expected, he listed all the units of storage, and went to approve these documents from the deputy head of department "A", Colonel Kudryavtsev.

- What are you, Seryozha? Crazy? the colonel asked, looking over the "storage units". - In no case. This is not Solzhenitsyn and Avtorkhanov. These are unique things. We will soon transfer them to Leninka with an orchestra and television. He returned the documents, but still kept one copy of the act.

Somehow, an instructor from the ideological department of the Central Committee came to Kumanin after school hours. Sergei Stepanovich, sitting in his office, tried, desperately tormented, to draw up the next monthly report on the "work" done by his unit. I had to work hard, coming up with all sorts of "exploits" of the group, in fact, all of them only recorded the activities of various monarchist, pro-monarchist and pseudo-monarchist informal organizations that have recently bred like rabbits.

The instructor of the Central Committee, a thin, blond, with a large receding hairline, a man of about fifty, was seriously concentrated.

"Comrade Kumanin," he began, "at this stage the center of the struggle for socialism is shifting.

In conversations with curators and instructors of the Central Committee of the CPSU, the main thing was not to ask any questions, but only to listen, demonstrating both complete approval and complete understanding with all your appearance. Therefore, Kumanin did not begin to find out where exactly the "center of the struggle for socialism" had moved, but continued to listen carefully. It turned out that with the beginning of the era of glasnost declared by Gorbachev, the party began to be attacked both from the left and from the right, and accused of all mortal sins.

"Everyone whom the CPSU has entrusted to serve in its combat detachments, primarily in the KGB, must defend the party," the instructor continued.

With all his appearance, S. Kumanin made it clear that in his sector he would never allow his ward monarchists to attack the party, even if this required round-the-clock preventive conversations with them. And then the thoughts that haunted Kumanin burst out and he said: "You can't go far on preventive talks alone, you need to take it and plant it!".

"I completely agree with you, Comrade Kumanin," the Central Committee instructor said, wiping his forehead with a handkerchief, "but, unfortunately, it is not we who decide, but the Politburo. And party discipline obliges us...

Kumanin reassured the instructor, assuring him that he expressed his opinion exclusively within the framework of party democratic centralism.

"There is an opinion," the instructor continued, "that at the current stage, the party should take control of many social processes that began in our country after the Central Committee and the Politburo headed for perestroika and glasnost....

At the last words, the instructor grimaced, as if from a toothache.

"And not only take these processes under your control," the instructor developed his thought, "but also influence them in line with party politics. This also applies to the area of work for which you, Comrade Kumanin, and the unit you head are responsible.

Kumanin listened attentively. Relations between the KGB and the Central Committee of the CPSU have long been established, which could well be called ritual.

First, the leadership of the organs was called to one of the secretaries of the Central Committee, the generals got acquainted with the party guidelines on all domestic political problems. It would be logical if, upon returning to the Offices, they gathered their subordinates and gave them directives for action. But nothing of the sort happened. All sorts of rumors began to creep around the Office, and the generals kept a mysterious silence. So a week went by, then another. Then the instructors of the Central Committee and various curators from

department for the management of "administrative bodies" under the Central Committee, which conducted individual instruction with them. Sometimes the case was brought down to the city committees and even to the district committees, but this rarely happened. After the instructors completed the introduction of the commanders of divisions of the heads of departments with the latest party guidelines, party meetings were held in the Directorate, and since all employees were members of the CPSU without exception, they could well be considered operational meetings, with the only difference that these meetings were not conducted heads of departments, and party organizers.

Speakers at the meetings were limited to vague formulations, since no one in the KGB was supposed to know what the neighboring unit was doing. The generals were also not more specific, even when they set a "combat" task for their subordinates. Juniors in rank had to understand what they wanted from them. Therefore, most of the information could be gleaned from conversations with instructors of the Central Committee.

"Recently," the instructor continued, "an unhealthy hype has been created around the personality of the last Russian Tsar Nicholas II with signs of idealization of his person. This is especially true of the well-known events in Yekaterinburg in July 1918, the seventieth anniversary of which falls on the current year. There is an opinion that we should reconsider our position regarding the personality of the last king in a positive way.

aspect. Their people will have to be introduced into the monarchist organizations in order to prevent the emergence of large socio-political unions. Do you understand me, Comrade Kumanin?

"The personality of the tsar," Kumanin admitted, "has never interested me. He was good, bad - this is a purely ideological question. In our work, we proceeded solely from the extent to which the monarchist underground poses a danger to the party and the state, which we, the Chekists, are obliged to protect. Theoretically, we took as a basis the work of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, who, with his characteristic genius, branded the last Romanov with such epithets as "the worst enemy of the people", "bloodthirsty", "hangman", "executioner", "pogromist", "monster" and so on. Further. The last instruction from the Central Committee, as far as I remember, said: "No matter how modern well-wishers from the West try to whitewash him, they cannot cover up the bloody stigma from the tsar, the strangler of the people with any make-up." This is the theoretical basis that we have been guided by so far. What is the new one?

"You are absolutely right, Comrade Kumanin," the instructor sighed, "but, unfortunately, from now on you will have to be guided by other provisions in your work. It must be admitted that the tsar was not an evil person, believed in Russia, treated his family well and was not an alcoholic, as previously stated. The opinion that he was a completely incompetent statesman remains valid. But that's not the point. It must be emphasized in every possible way that neither Lenin nor the party bears any responsibility for what happened in Yekaterinburg.

- And who is responsible? Kumanin asked.

"Jews," the instructor sighed again.

— Jews? Kumanin asked.

"That is, Zionists," the instructor corrected himself, although it was well known that the instructors of the Central Committee were not guild agitators and never said a single superfluous word, let alone made a reservation.

"You are well aware," the instructor continued, "that our Party has waged and is waging a consistent struggle against Zionism. The forms of this struggle may change, but its essence remains unchanged: exposure of the intrigues and crimes of Zionism by all available means and their suppression. This applies not only to the present, but also to the past. On this

even more of the past than the future, since the Politburo is developing a set of measures to normalize relations with Israel. But this should in no way affect the fundamental questions of ideology. Therefore, the opinion arose that comrades Troitsky, Yurovsky, Goloshchekin and even comrade Sverdlov were not so much Bolsheviks as Zionists who infiltrated the Bolshevik ranks with their numerous fellow accomplices in order to destroy Russian statehood and seize power. At present, the scientific department of the Central Committee is selecting the appropriate statements of Comrade Lenin on this issue. Therefore, the murder of the Romanov family should be considered not so much political as ritual. Do you catch my thought, comrade Kumanin?

Kumanin silently nodded.

"Then," the instructor said in a monotonous voice, "these same comrades kindled the fire of civil war in Russia with the aim of exterminating the Russian people, which our party and its leaders, comrades Lenin and Stalin, opposed in every possible way. In this vein, but in more cautious terms, it is necessary to work with the monarchist and other organizations, which we will call "conservative" for the time being. It is desirable that through them these ideas penetrate the press and find a response from the creative intelligentsia, which is not indifferent to the fate of the motherland and socialism. That's all I can say for now. But I hope the problem is clear to you.

Major Kumanin was not a convinced anti-Semite, like, say, those of his colleagues who fought Zionism on a broad front as part of the same 5th Directorate. In his life, he had little contact with Jews, one might even say he never encountered Jews at all. So it was fate. At the time when Seryozha was growing up and maturing, among his father's acquaintances and colleagues there were no Jews and could not be. There was one Jewish boy at school, but somewhere else in the class, I think in the fifth, he left with his parents for America, and he was branded at a meeting of the council of the squad. The mathematician, old Fishman, did not evoke any positive or negative emotions in him. And at MGIMO in those years when Sergei studied there, of course, there was not a single Jew, either among the students or among the teachers. It cannot be said that the Jews generally aroused any emotions in Kumanin.

And now this task

Kumanin was smart and educated enough to understand that the party had faltered, begun to retreat from its positions and, diverting attention from itself, covered itself with a smoke screen, choosing the Jews for this, because there was no one else. Well, he, as a KGB officer and a soldier of the party, which alone can point out an enemy to him at this stage, is obliged to fight this enemy, neutralize him or destroy him.

The sleepy life of the Kumanin group began to seethe again. New ideas flew to the masses through informants, organizations were created that were not so much monarchist, except for paraphernalia, but anti-Semitic. Uniforms were sewn for them, money was allocated for newspapers and magazines of the corresponding direction, and lectures were given. Kumanin flew to Yekaterinburg, Omsk and Novosibirsk, where, under the guise of a historian, he gave several lectures on the last days of the royal family, in which the participants in the murder were exposed, and their pseudonyms were revealed, with which they covered their Jewish names and surnames. His former group, in which he once fought the monarchists, has almost doubled in size. Officers who had previously fought the Zionist danger joined it, bringing new knowledge and their volcanic energy to the unit's activities. S. S. Kumanin himself almost never visited his office in the Lubyanka. He flew to different cities, disappeared in the Central Committee, in the Union of Writers of the USSR and the RSFSR, wandered around the editorial offices of various newspapers, consulted historians, taught directors.

Documents have already gone upstairs about the extraordinary assignment of the title to him

lieutenant colonels, which at less than 33 years old was not bad at all! Colleagues envied - that's a hell of a peasant. Who would have thought that such a career could be made on the former tsar!

If anyone did not welcome his enthusiasm, it was Kumanin Sr., with whom Sergei was accustomed to consult from childhood. Only when he heard about the Jews, Stepan Agafonovich became alert, not for the fate of the latter, of course, but for the fate of his son.

"Be careful, Seryozha," he advised, "don't get too carried away. This was already the case in the fifties. They repeat. Many workers, who in those years fanned this smokescreen, were then slapped without trial or investigation. And those who were not slapped were expelled from the organs without a pension. Many have been imprisoned. You look...

Sergei waved it off: "Times are not the same now. In this case, I will get a lieutenant colonel and become the head of the department. And this is already a colonel's position. I'll be a colonel at thirty-five, isn't that bad? And what will happen to these Jews who killed our tsar? We control the situation. No one will lay a finger on them. Let them calmly leave for their Israel. We are not as stupid as you, dad. You then, in the fifties, lost your sense of proportion

- for which they paid the price.

Stepan Agafonovich only shook his head. "What to do with the youth? They walk over the mines and smile. Wisdom cannot be learned from someone else's experience. Only in your own skin. That's the way the world works, you see."

But anxiety grew in my father's heart.

In the kaleidoscope of events, the days flew by with terrible speed. Not very noisy rallies were held on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the execution of the royal family, at which, as was intended, they branded not so much Lenin and his party as the Zionists who had crept into it, who, for simplicity, were already called either Judeo-Masons or Judeo-Zionists, but then just Jews.

But the seething energy of Major Kumanin and his subordinates gave other shoots. Voices began to be heard about the need to reburial the remains of the royal family in a consecrated grave according to the Christian Orthodox rite. Now Kumanin had to speak before Russian emigrants of the first wave, deep old men, and before their descendants, to sit on the presidiums of various congresses of compatriots, Slavic and

Orthodox brotherhood, instruct the clergy and even the patriarch himself.

Meanwhile, a message came that the famous screenwriter Radiy Ryabchenko had found the remains of the tsar and his family, and that the burial of the sacred remains would soon take place in the presence of the English queen, who is a distant relative of the Romanovs.

It was the end of May 1989.

Kumanin remembered that day well. He sat in the Leninka special depository and studied a brochure about the ritual murders of Christian babies by Jews, published in Munich in 1935 (MGIMO graduates were supposed to know two foreign languages). The work was printed in Gothic type, so the reading went slowly, and Kumanin was in a state of some irritation. There was little time. He still had to make it to the Academy of Sciences for a seminar on Slavic writing and culture. Many historians still vehemently resisted claims that it was the Jews, and not

communists. It was necessary to convince them subtly, not at all like at rallies. At that moment Kumanin was called to the telephone.

"Kumanin," he heard the voice of Colonel Kudryavtsev, who by this time had already become the head of department "A", he heard in the receiver, "do you ever show up at work at all?" Where are you

Do you work: with us or in the "Memory" society? Tomorrow by nine zero-zero, to be at the workplace. The general is calling you. And he hung up.

The words "the general is calling you" did not explain anything, of course. First, which general? Recently, Kumanin reported on the work done to both General Prilukov (head of the KGB of Moscow and the Moscow region), and General Abramov (head of the "bush" of ideological departments), and even once General Bobkov (deputy chairman of the KGB).

Which one is calling? Usually no one called. They asked for an appointment to settle these or other stalled questions.

I thought about a possible promotion. The paper on the lieutenant colonel went somewhere upstairs more than a year ago, and they got lost there. Maybe they finally returned, and he is called in connection with another promotion? I wanted it to be so, but experience suggested that they were called to the big bosses only to give wicks, and the promotion was reported from the personnel department, and not by generals, but by retired inspector majors who had dug in there almost since the Yezhov era.

Sergey went over mentally all his affairs for the last month. "Everything seems to be fine, everything is agreed, everything is within the framework of the instructions and instructions received." Kumanin did not allow himself any gag. The service taught him to shy away from improvisation. Reasonable initiative is possible, but only within the framework of the received order. However, the authorities will always find something to put a fuse on.

IV

Arriving at Lubyanka at nine in the morning, Kumanin was surprised to learn that General Klimov was calling him, about whom no one could really say what he was doing and what kind of person he was. There were rumors that Klimov began his service almost under Abakumov and was an officer in a special group, having made a career of skillfully breaking the noses of employees who had fallen out of favor with the formidable minister with pliers. But those more knowledgeable argued that Klimov appeared in the central apparatus of the KGB only under Andropov, and before that he worked somewhere in the south. Kumanin himself saw Klimov no more than ten times in his entire service and never once reported to him. I saw it mainly at solemn meetings, where Klimov was dozing in the presidium, and Kumanin in the hall. True, five years ago he accidentally met General Klimov in the corridor of the Office, and he was taken aback by a completely unexpected question: "Kumanin! Why haven't you married yet?" Sergei was taken aback by such a question, blushed and did not know what to answer. The general smiled graciously and said: "Get married while young. Our brother after forty is no longer ..." and went further along the corridor. Kumanin thought that all this could mean that his father had called Klimov, who had recently pestered Sergey with similar questions - he wanted grandchildren. But Sergei made a promise to himself not to marry until he received the rank of colonel, and he didn't feel like it, to be honest. He devoted himself completely to work, although the bachelor life was not particularly encouraged in the KGB. Family has always been a factor that reduces the likelihood of any employee bucks.

Therefore, Kumanin, with some excitement, but without any timidity, entered General Klimov's waiting room, as d'Artagnan had once entered Richelieu's waiting room.

The pretty ensign leaned over the selector and cooed:

- Major Kumanin on your call, Viktor Ivanovich, - and, raising his eyes to Kumanin, said:

- Come on in.

The general was sitting without a jacket, with an untied tie, and was reading a newspaper, judging by the font and

layout, - "Moscow News".

At the sight of Kumanin, he gestured for him to sit down, but "did not allow him to touch his hand," which Sergey mentally noted. When you enter some high authority, it is very important whether he honors you with a handshake or not.

Although Klimov S. Kumanin did not honor him with a handshake, he greeted him cordially, again asking:

- Well, Sergey, got married? No? Right! In our work, there is nothing to acquire families. Only to produce widows, and orphans, - and he laughed.

The start was promising. Viktor Ivanovich asked how the service was, and, having received the same stereotypical answer: "everything is fine, Comrade General," he asked Kumanin a question:

- So who slapped the tsar: the Bolsheviks or the Jews?

Kumanin was confused:

"The instructions were direct, Comrade General, from the Central Committee.

"That's not what I'm asking about," Klimov laughed again, "I want to know what you yourself think about it?"

Of course, you can laugh it off, say, they say, I'm not supposed to think, my job is to follow orders, but every junior officer has a sixth sense that unmistakably tells when you can joke with the leadership and when not. Therefore, he made an attempt to evade the answer, hiding behind a long and vague phrase, which was often used in various versions at the dawn of perestroika and glasnost.

"It seems to me, Comrade General," Kumanin replied, "that certain political forces striving for power want to use the fate of the last Romanovs in their own interests.

Klimov appreciated the major's answer.

"Kumanin," he said, "you were asked a specific question: who killed the tsar? And instead of answering, you seem to be going to give me a lecture, like those you read in the "Society of the Slavic Brotherhood." So who killed our king. Our party?

"The tsar was shot by decision of the Ural Regional Council," Kumanin went on the defensive, "without the knowledge of the center due to the inevitability of the capture of Yekaterinburg by the White Guards and the impossibility of evacuating the Romanovs to the rear. The Ekaterinburg comrades immediately informed Lenin and Sverdlov about this action, who ...

"You can immediately see a graduate of MGIMO," Klimov interrupted him. - In our Stavropol region, in an agricultural technical school, where I once studied as a veterinarian, history was taught better. Okay, keep going.

"In view of the fact," Sergei continued uncertainly, "there were many comrades among the Ekaterinburg comrades, i.e. persons of Jewish nationality, a historical hypothesis arose that these persons, along with party tasks, could also solve their narrow national tasks ...

- No, - Klimov interrupted him again, - it is absolutely impossible to allow operational workers to communicate for a long time with idiots from the Central Committee. This leads to liquefaction of the brain. If you, Kumanin, had dared to carry this to the late Yuri Vladimirovich, by whose order you were hired by us, then, I assure you, he would immediately order to take you to the basement and

shoot. But for some reason everyone thinks that I can't order this. But I can.

Klimov said all this with a smile, but his eyes became glassy, although they remained radiant.

Instead of being mortally frightened, Kumanin got angry, which he himself did not expect.

"I don't understand," he said sharply, "what answer you expect from me, Comrade General." The people who killed the Romanov family were neither Jews nor Bolsheviks. But among them were Jews and Bolsheviks. He paused and added: "And Jewish Bolsheviks.

"Well, why are you flustered," Klimov said peacefully, "you don't understand jokes. You know, now I'm not so much interested in, seriously speaking, the question of who killed the Romanov family and for what, but something completely different: where did they bury them? Do you know by any chance?

"So Ryabchenko found a burial," Kumanin answered, "I myself am in some newspaper read...

"I would have this Ryabchenko," Klimov remarked irritably, "tear off his balls for all his deeds. Swindler!

The general handed Kumanin a newspaper, which turned out to be the issue of Moscow News for April 16 of this year. On the last page of the newspaper there was an image of a skull with a continuous cavity instead of a mouth, as if crying out to heaven. Above the photograph, in large blue letters, was the caption: "The Remains of the Last Tsar Have Been Discovered!" and just below the subtitle: "The burial place of Nicholas II and his family was opened." Under the skull was the inscription: "The skull of Nicholas II. Identified by Radiy Ryabchenko, who discovered him near Sverdlovsk.

This was followed by an interview with Ryabchenko himself, given by him to the correspondent of the newspaper Alexander Kabakov. When asked by a correspondent whether he could prove that the remains he found really belonged to the tsar and his family, and that their burial place had been discovered, the former police colonel replied: "I am ready to offer the remains I found to any commission of experts. But only if I receive an assurance that they will be buried according to the Christian rite. Until then, the place of their burial will remain a secret." When asked what made him, a police colonel who previously wrote scripts praising the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and then began to expose corruption in the police, to take up this story, Ryabchenko explained: "Such a historical drama - the execution of the royal family without trial - remains very mysterious", and then, he was always interested in this drama. He went on to describe how he came to Sverdlovsk in 1976 (and not 1975) as a "popular police writer" to meet with local police personnel, how he suddenly realized that must visit the Ipatiev House and find the grave of the king. "Something pushed me," he confessed to a journalist. "It was a voice from above...".

"I read it all, comrade general," Kumanin said, having watched the interview again and put the newspaper on the table. - Is it difficult to force this Ryabchenko to show the place of burial? I'll call him to my place tomorrow, and he won't come out of here until he tells me everything and shows me ...

"Don't get excited," the general interrupted him. - Ryabchenko acted on our instructions. It is we, or rather, I, the old fool, allowed him to transfer these materials to the press. The examination checked the skull that you see in the photo and determined that it is female. Nowadays, the times are such that few people can be hired for bullshit. Science has moved forward so much - what you want to determine. There is a genetic analysis of bones and much more that our forensic experts and forensic experts never dreamed of. As for all sorts of finds, you know, our

the country is such where you don't dig, you will definitely stumble upon a pile of skulls with bullet holes in back of the head ...

The general paused, thinking about something.

- And how does Ryabchenko explain all this? Kumanin put in a question.

"At first he went into complete denial," explained Klimov, "I don't know anything, they say." The grave has been found. Then, on the way to the mines, their car broke down, and they all buried almost right on the road. Our guys in Sverdlovsk looked around this place, but what can they say? No one specifically dealt with this issue, and this Radiy Ryabchenko assures that he rummaged through all the archives, calculating where they were buried. At first he said that the experts were wrong. I talked to him. A woman's skull differs from a man's by eye, just like a woman from a man. True, there are borderline situations that require special analysis, but in the case of this skull, everything was very clear. I explained this to Ryabchenko. I gave him a lecture on anthropology and promised to rot in the zone. Perhaps he really made a mistake in his calculations, or perhaps something is obscure. They and the deceased Shchelokov had long been aiming to drive the royal remains over the hill and get currency for it. Maybe he is waiting for an opportunity, that's why he keeps the place of burial a secret for the time being, and leads us by the nose. I think we ourselves need to find the royal grave. What do you think, Kumanin?

Why all this is necessary, - Kumanin did not understand, - but, in order to answer something to Klimov's question, he muttered not very confidently:

"Yes, Comrade General.

"Wonderful," Klimov was delighted. I like that you understand the importance of the problem. Therefore, by order of the head of department, you are seconded to my disposal. Hand over the leadership of the group to your deputy. You are tasked with finding the real burial. As part of this assignment, you are given exclusive powers. You will report to me personally. All clear?

- What about the deadline? Kumanin asked.

"Well done," Klimov praised. You know the service. Not more than a year. And keep in mind, Kumanin, the matter is under the control of the Secretary General. A very important matter. I have your lieutenant colonel papers in my safe. If you complete the task, they will come out of the safe already approved along with the order, so do your best. Go do it. Kudryavtsev is already in the know. He does not need to know the essence of the matter. When you pass the cases - try until dinner - you will receive the appropriate instructions in my waiting room. All. I wish you success. The general pointed to the door.

Chapter 2

I

The instructions that Kumanin received in the evening of the same day at General Klimov's secretariat stated that "Major Kumanin is performing a particularly important government task," and therefore "all party and Soviet bodies" are obliged to render him full assistance. The order was printed on the letterhead of the Chairman of the KGB of the USSR, and the famous red insert in the certificate was attached to it, capable of opening any doors for its owner, including the armored ramps of government bunkers. Having signed for receipt, Kumanin returned to his office in order to think over the situation before going home. Taking over from him the business of commanding the unit, the head of the department, Colonel Kudryavtsev, made, as they say, his lips in a bow, smacked his lips and

said:

- Look, Sergey, I would refuse. Those who directly worked with Klimov, roughly speaking, either immediately jumped over the rank, or are still on some long business trips. And I strongly suspect that they flew on these business trips through the chimney of the crematorium," he looked at Kumanin and added: "Okay, just kidding.

Kumanin sealed his fireproof cabinets with the "Romanov" library, hung signs "Do not open!" on the nickel-plated handles of the locks. and went home, continuing to think about the conversation with Klimov.

"Why was I chosen for this task?"

This is the first question that the operational worker, if he has already passed the age of youthful romanticism, should have asked himself if he had the desire to quietly retire when he was due.

"What is the result for management?" - This is the second question, which was even more difficult to answer. The command did not always need an objective picture, and the operative himself must guess what is expected of him, constantly balancing over the abyss, because sometimes the leadership itself does not know what result it expects. In addition, these "expectations" could change over time. There is a rather logical answer to the first question: he spent his entire service in the Lubyanka engaged in monarchists, and the leadership could get the impression that he was a great specialist in this matter. In fact, Sergei Stepanovich did not delve deeply into monarchical affairs, but only struggled with specific manifestations of this atavism in Soviet society. With the search for an answer to the second question, the situation was unimportant. Why didn't Klimov turn to some scientists: historians, local historians and the like. But, on reflection, Kumanin came to the conclusion that, firstly, General Klimov may have already turned to experts and received nothing intelligible from them, and, secondly, are there specialists on this issue in the scientific world now? Funny. Kumanin has spent the last two years cooking enough in their midst to understand that no one really knows anything, they relish only common truths, gleaned mainly from popular pamphlets, the texts of which were slipped to them by Kumanin and his subordinates. This means that he was instructed to conduct the first professional investigation: under what circumstances and how the royal family was killed, where its members were buried, and what then happened to their remains. Apparently, establishing the exact and conclusive burial place of the imperial family is the essence of the task, but why did the authorities need this?

From the little that General Klimov said to Sergei, it was obvious that big politics was involved here - "the matter is under the control of himself." "Is not Gorbachev, who now also became president, going to declare himself emperor as a result? And he needed the royal remains, say, for some kind of ritual oath at his own coronation: "I swear on the sacred ashes of my predecessors on the All-Russian throne ..." or something like that.

Indeed, is a monarchical coup being prepared in the country? For all the wildness of such an assumption, there is nothing incredible in its basis. First, there have been similar precedents in history. You can think of Boris Godunov, you can think of a closer one - Emperor Napoleon III, who first became president, and then took and declared himself emperor. True, he was the nephew of the Great Bonaparte, which somehow justified him. With us, any relationship, especially a distant one, can be proved in six minutes.

"Then," Kumanin continued to think, "at best, I will have to flee somewhere abroad. There will definitely be kind people who will remember what I

studied at the Lubyanka. Ridiculous as such arguments were, they did not so much amuse Kumanin as they intensified the strange discomfort that he had felt from the moment he left General Klimov's office.

But why is all this needed right now? Klimov said that Shchelokov and Ryabchenko once conducted a search for the royal remains with the aim of selling them abroad, where many emigrant organizations were ready to pay any money in order to rescue the relics of the canonized new martyrs "from desecration". Whether it was, say, in the thirties, they could slip anyone's remains into them. Now this number will not work. Examination will immediately detect any forgery. Did Shchelokov and Ryabchenko understand this? The late Minister of the Interior stole hypnotized - he did not even hesitate to order the shooting of the famous actress Zoya Fyodorova because of some kind of diamond "tsatsek", but the smart Ryabchenko had to direct him on the right path. This means that they had to look for a real burial place, otherwise the "clients" will immediately expose them and will not hesitate to start a universal scandal. It is very likely that Shchelokov was not the initiator of this whole affair. It is no coincidence that the beginning of the search conducted by Ryabchenko coincided in time with the demolition of the Ipatiev House. Apparently, somewhere it was decided to finally close this issue: to demolish the house, and transfer the remains abroad. But why just pass it on, if Russian communities scattered all over the world, together with close and distant relatives of the deceased who are still alive, are ready to pay for it?

And what does the current secretary general want to do with the remains now? Get another loan for restructuring under them? Or, if you believe what Ryabchenko says in his numerous interviews, rebury them according to the Christian rite somewhere not far from the mausoleum, in order to give a new incentive to tourists who come to Moscow solely to stare at the Moscow Kremlin with St. Basil's Cathedral, go to the Tretyakov Gallery and the Bolshoi Theatre. And here there will be another reason to come to Moscow and spend the currency on strengthening peace and socialism. As M. Gorbachev says: "More socialism, more democracy!"

"Interestingly," Kumanin continued to reflect, himself surprised at the course of his thoughts, "during the seventy-two years of Soviet power, nothing has actually been created that would look attractive or even entertaining in the eyes of foreign tourists, except for the monuments and busts of Vladimir Ilyich stuck everywhere. . But everything created before the revolution, including Russian ballet, arouses burning interest in the world. Even our rocket and space successes are not as attractive to the Western foreign tourist as some wooden church, miraculously preserved in the fire, which was used to destroy "opium for the people", or an icon. Can all this be explained by the "biological" anti-communism of foreigners, or are the reasons much deeper?"

Kumanin recalled how, while still a lieutenant, under the guise of a tour guide, he led a delegation of left-wing deputies of the French parliament through the Lenin Museum. The deputies were frankly bored, although out of courtesy they tried to hide it and patiently listened to his story about the incredible ordeals of the leader of the world proletariat in tsarist prisons and exile, where he was forced to make chess from bread and sympathetic ink from milk and was terribly indignant when he did not receive from the "terry reactionary" of the Irkutsk governor-general a suckling pig at the expense of the treasury for the next Orthodox holiday. But on the other hand, how they roared when, having gone out into the square, they saw the domes of St. Basil's Cathedral, how they bombarded Kumanin with questions (they did not ask a single one in the museum). Who and when built such a magnificent cathedral, is it possible to inspect its decoration from the inside, who is its rector, when is the service in it? Kumanin, slightly bewildered, answered as best he could, and then announced that the cathedral was currently under restoration and services were temporarily canceled. He caught himself thinking that he did not know the creator of this miracle of architecture. At home, I looked into the Great Soviet Encyclopedia, but I did not find anything there. He was a stubborn man, so he looked for the Soviet Historical Encyclopedia in the library and

that the cathedral was built in 1555-1560 to commemorate the accession of the Kazan Khanate to the Muscovite state. The cathedral was built by the masters Barma and Postnik, who were ordered to be blinded by the grateful Tsar Ivan Vasilyevich the Terrible after the construction was completed. The king was so delighted with the masterpiece that he was afraid that the masters would not erect such a miracle anywhere else, and took "measures". MGIMO, which at one time graduated from Kumanin, among other things, gave his pupils a historical education in the scope of the university. In those days, Kumanin, perhaps for the first time, thought about what he knows from the history of his own country. He could name the dates of party congresses, party conferences, plenums forging the general line of the party. The NEP period, the heroic years of the first five-year plans, the Great Patriotic War, the great rocket and space era, the end of which should coincide in time with the final and complete victory of communism throughout the world. Everything, but is it all after 1917? And before? Four hundred years of the Tatar-Mongol yoke, the creation of the Moscow state, the reforms of Peter, the invasion of Napoleon, Borodino, Pushkin, the Decembrists, Herzen, and then a continuous struggle against the autocracy until the victory of the Great October Revolution. The history of Russia remained vague, phrases popped up in my memory, as if from the Charter of the Guard Service. The uprising of Stepan Razin, the uprising of Emelyan Pugachev, the trial of Radishchev. The Decembrists, Pushkin and Lermontov, and then the Narodniks, Narodnaya Volya, Social Revolutionaries, Mensheviks and Bolshevik triumphs followed in succession. And what does he know, say, about the reign of Alexei Mikhailovich, or Catherine II, or Nicholas I? What does he know about the man whose grave he was ordered to find, and on whom his further service in a strange way depends?

Nothing at all, although his safes contain probably more photographs of the last king, confiscated during various searches, than in some state archives, if they are preserved there at all. Nicholas II, still a child in his mother's arms, a young man in a naval uniform, a photograph of the emperor with his wife and children, with various statesmen (mostly unknown to him), with ambassadors, with generals, at the Mogilev headquarters, in Tsarskoye Selo and, finally, in Tobolsk. Sergei could not remember if there were any photographs of the Yekaterinburg period or not?

So, he had to admit that he knew nothing about the identity of the last king, nor about his fate.

True, the main task of their activity was to compromise not so much the last Romanov as the monarchist movement in the country, its disintegration as a whole, the suppression of unifying tendencies both within the USSR and with the monarchist organizations of the West.

Without false modesty, we can say that he, Kumanin, and his unit brilliantly coped with the assigned tasks.

Firstly, it was possible to prove the complete illegitimacy of the claims to the post of heir to the throne of the head of the Russian Imperial House in exile, Vladimir Kirillovich Romanov, not to mention all the other true and false pretenders. Among the first were numerous descendants of the five sons of Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich. Among the latter impostors are spontaneous and decoys. Interacting with colleagues from the 1st Directorate (foreign intelligence) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we managed to raise several wonderful adventurers posing as the grandchildren of the royal daughters. "Vnukov" was exposed by "Interpol", but their very appearance brought additional confusion to the monarchist movement within the country, melting before our eyes just at the moment when, according to the logic of events, it should have been intensively developing. The ingenious idea of blaming the Jews for the Yekaterinburg tragedy, born in the Central Committee of the CPSU, creatively developed in the KGB and successfully introduced into scattered monarchist groups by provocateurs, led to the fact that these organizations quickly turned into something resembling bandit formations, from which not only noble people shied away with horror

gray-haired elders from the first wave of emigration, but also the local police.

Thanks to the efforts of Kumanin, the monarchists were dressed in a uniform that gave a caricature and ridiculous look, although it was supposed to cause awe. In the public, their appearance inevitably evoked associations with mummers buffoons.

For the "Memory" society, Kumanin, through the Main Political Directorate of the Armed Forces, got an old-style naval uniform and black caps for submariners. Its leader, Dmitry Vasiliev, was the first to wear this uniform, decorating it with general's epaulettes and a police harness. The tunic was complemented by black breeches tucked into high boots. Once Kumanin personally inspected the new army, which considered itself the locum tenens of the Russian throne and the vanguard in the war against the Jews, and was satisfied. "Let someone else hint at the bright purity of monarchist ideas!"

The form was decorated with all sorts of crosses, badges, double-headed eagles and other paraphernalia, adding to the absurdity and forcing everyone to stay away from these fellows, as if from sin. Smaller groups were dressed in uniforms allegedly worn by officers of the tsarist army and White Guard formations. Spontaneous production of themselves into officers began: captains, captains, cornets, lieutenants, staff captains, staff captains, cornets, centurions. At the Lubyanka they laughed to tears. Dragoons of His Majesty, Her Majesty's Lancers, Cossacks of His Highness the Heir Tsesarevich, Her Majesty's First Naval Crew of the Queen of Hellenes...

Life Guards, Life Cossacks, Life Doctors, Leiba Trotsky...

To help them, several former instructors from city committees and district committees were seconded, who, within the framework of party discipline, resignedly climbed into the baggy uniforms of tsarist colonels, clumsily baptized on miraculous icons. The professional fighters against Zionists attached to the monarchists from the Institute of Marxism-Leninism and from various departments of the history of the CPSU, scientific communism and Marxist-Leninist philosophy, where there was a wholesale reduction, felt more confident. Yesterday's professors and associate professors, using their many years of teaching experience, famously organized rallies, branded Zionists, Masons, Jews and Maramoys. This is how the "method" of popularizing monarchism was formed.

And above all this towered the shy, simple and kind face of the last Russian monarch who fell in an unequal struggle against Zionism, as if he were not the All-Russian Emperor, but the King of Jordan.

"In the Jordan he who baptizes!"

The KGB led the Russian Church through the catacombs for a long time, in fact turning it into one of its branches, just like the official church. Some priests from the catacombs and from the entourage of official metropolitans were also attracted to the case, reminding that the Jews not only slaughtered the king, but also crucified Christ.

The idea born in the bowels of the Central Committee was put into practice by Kumanin's unit, which, it is ridiculous to say, numbered seventeen people. Sometimes, in order to assist, temporarily gave ten people from other units. But I had to work not only in Moscow, but also in all major cities of the Union: Leningrad, Minsk, Kiev, Sverdlovsk, Omsk, Novosibirsk, up to Vladivostok. How much energy and creative impulse it took to reduce the whole monarchist idea to simple Judaism!

Of course, there were also costs. Once Kumanin was summoned to Staraya Square and shown the newspaper Puls Tushino, one of the secret founders of which was himself. The newspaper published a photograph of the unveiling of a monument to Karl Marx in Moscow with the following caption: "The Jew Kleber

opens a monument to the Jew Marx on the Square of the Jew Sverdlov. Comrade Kumanin was mildly scolded and warned not to improvise by his wards. Another Kumanin newspaper, Russkoe Resurrection, published a selection of materials proving Lenin's Jewish origin. Sergei was reprimanded by phone, so far without entering.

He gathered the editors and forbade them henceforth, until further notice, to mention in their newspapers the leaders of the party and the proletariat, be it Rosa Luxemburg or Lazar Kaganovich. At the end of the conversation, he ordered to switch to everyday anti-Semitism and threatened to disperse. Then there was a more serious puncture. Someone managed to tape record one of his lectures, given in the Academgorodok of Novosibirsk, and even photographed him. The photo first appeared in a Russian-language Israeli newspaper under the headline "New Eichmann - KGB Colonel Sergei Kumanin - prepares public opinion in the USSR for another final solution to the Jewish question." Kumanin always gave lectures, hiding under an assumed name. It was interesting who calculated him and how, although he erroneously promoted him to colonel. Outraged was the content of the article itself, which stated that he called for the mass extermination of the Jewish population of the country as retribution for the murder of the royal family, although nothing like this had ever happened. On the contrary, all the leaders of the monarchist organizations, turned anti-Semitic by Kumanin, were sternly warned: as soon as they cross certain boundaries in their fighting enthusiasm, they will immediately be put in their place within the framework of the fierce Soviet

legislation, and no one will even lift a finger to save them. And any mention of the KGB, no matter how unsubstantiated it may be, will only lead to an increase in the term and strengthening of the detention regime.

However, the Israeli slander was reprinted with pleasure by several influential European newspapers, and Radio Liberty, not without malice, quoted the article in its press review, adding a recording of Kumanin's lecture, which spoke of the eternal craving of Jews for ritual murders.

This was called "exploding one's own mines."

It was very disappointing that departments were left in the shadows, day and night fighting against Zionism under the leadership of a host of generals, and he, Kumanin, who fought against manifestations of Russian chauvinism, fell into the spotlight. "The only small unit, designed to educate Russian people in the spirit of the moral code of the builders of communism, was dragged into the fight against the Jews and framed." Only one of his own could give out the name of Kumanin. It was clear as day. Kumanin himself knew well how this was done; he worked in the office for several days. The names of the operatives are secret, but when necessary, any cleaner will call your last name, complaining that you do not wipe your feet at the entrance to the department. And you will be fired in disgrace.

At that time, Colonel Kudryavtsev demanded an explanatory note from Kumanin. At the same time, he cursed, but not at the address of Kumanin, but at the address of "these fagots from the Central Committee, who, of course, laid 'you, Sergey' in order to go into the shadows themselves, and set up the KGB." Apparently, they had a puncture somewhere.

Two weeks later, a call to General Klimov followed. "It turns out that Klimov actually removed him from business, taking him at his personal disposal." In other words, he was removed from his lieutenant colonel's position, and it is not known which one he was appointed to. Maybe they were generally taken out of state (there were as many such cases as you like), so that it would be more convenient to deal with them later. "Father was right when he advised to avoid such cases."

"On the other hand, can it really be called disgrace when he is chosen by the leadership to complete a task that is under the control of the Secretary General. Everything is strange, I must say, very strange.

Such chaotic thoughts and memories overcame Kumanin on the way to Izmailovo, to his father. He had not seen his father for more than two months. For business, it was rarely possible to visit the old man.

Stepan Agafonovich lived alone in a two-room apartment. His wife, Anna Sergeevna, died when Sergei was four years old. Sergey himself lived in a one-room apartment, received from the generosity of the Office, in a large departmental house not far from the Aeroport metro station. The older brother, lieutenant colonel of the border troops, lived with his family in Dushanbe.

Stepan Agafonovich raised his sons alone. After the death of his wife, he refused a new marriage, "so that the boys do not have a stepmother," although there were many options. And although now he liked to grumble at the youth in general and at his sons in particular, he was proud of them in his heart: the party had a special trust in the guys - they don't take anyone into the Chekists anyway.

Kumanin Sr. did not like hugs and kisses of all kinds. He shook hands with his son, sternly examined him from head to toe and grunted: "I could have called, otherwise I completely disappeared. I already thought that you yourself fell victim to ritual murder, like a baby in the time of King Herod.

"Worse," Sergey laughed, "I got into such a thing that soon all the Zionists in the world will start hunting for me as for Eichmann.

The father pricked his son with an alarmed look:

- What's happened?

- Nonsense, - Sergey dismissed, - if you could tell, you would laugh.

The father's apartment was clean, but uncomfortable, like in the barracks. True, it was the environment in which Sergei grew up, and therefore seemed native.

The old sofa on which Stepan Agafonovich slept turned into an armchair during the day. An old sideboard was decorated with bronze busts of Lenin and Dzerzhinsky, both not purchased, but given to Kumanin Sr. on the occasion of some anniversaries. The letter of the Central Committee of the Komsomol, framed in a strict frame, reminded of the pre-war times, when twenty-year-old Stepan Kumanin was delegated from the border detachment to the congress of the Komsomol in Moscow. Above the sofa, also in a strict frame, is a photograph of Stepan Agafonovich with the late Anna Sergeevna. Stepan and Anna are young, in tunics with lieutenant's dice on their buttonholes. On the faces - an expression of genuine happiness -

just married.

Sergey understood that he really needed to move in together, but there was no time to do the exchange.

We went to the kitchen, where Stepan Agafonovich treated his son to tea with dryers.

- Do you want condensed milk? - suggested the father, - In the "veteran" they gave out two cans per nose. She is not in the city.

"Thank you," Sergey refused. - In our buffet, take this condensed milk at least in boxes.

- What are you doing now? Stepan Agafonovich asked. Do you expose all Jews?

"They removed me from this case," Sergei admitted. - Now, dad, he went to work directly with the management. Apparently, I was noticed in the Central Committee. Soon I will be a big man.

"You are talking about this without much joy," said the father.

"I'll tell you honestly," Sergei admitted, "all the milestones and landmarks that I used to have disappeared somewhere. I do a lot, but understand little. Even in your area. Tell me, why the hell did someone at the top need all this dregs with glasnost and perestroika? As they used to say in your time, what is the general line of the party today? Can you answer me?"

"I don't know," Stepan Agafonovich sighed. - In our camp of veterans, too, everyone is confused. There is no way to understand what is going on. Everyone blames the CIA and the Zionists. They managed to get their way, they say, into the very heart of our party, and they began its collapse from within. And the signal was sabotage in Chernobyl.

Yes, Sergey thought. "Tell me, dad, don't you get the impression that someone wants to replace our power with a monarchy again?"

- What? Father didn't understand. - Monarchy? And who is king?

"Well," Sergey chuckled, "they will always find the tsar. Look how many times it has been that successful generals have declared themselves emperors. And we have? For whom the guard, he is the king. It's not about personality. For whom our division of Dzerzhinsky is, consider, not only the king, but also God. But that's not what we're talking about. The king, there, the king, the emperor is just a personification of the monarchical way of society. It seems to me that now there are shifts in this direction.

"Don't talk nonsense," Kumanin senior got angry. - Although I didn't study with you, I also understand something in such matters - after the war I studied at the Political Academy for two whole years. The entire structure of the monarchy is based on inheritance law and class privileges. And the Bolsheviks from the very first day began to break this system. First, estates were abolished and with them, of course, privileges. All were given equal opportunities, depending on ability. What we have always strived for: "To each according to his needs, from each according to his ability."

"Tell me, dad," Sergei asked, "why didn't you send me to a music school?" I played the guitar very well in school. Many said that I even have talent. And my brother and I, like you, became Chekists. Do not explain, and it is so clear - you have connections, blasphemy in this world, when necessary - you can help to the best of your ability, when necessary - and lay straws. Here you have the beginnings of inheritance law, class privileges. And if you were, say, an opera singer, then I would become an artist. If you worked in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, then after graduation I would not end up in the KGB, but in some of our consulates, for example, somewhere in Varna.

"Don't get confused," Stepan Agafonovich smiled, "these are not class privileges, but, speaking in Russian, just blat. These are different things.

"But in development it inevitably leads to inheritance law," Sergei objected. "Look at North Korea. There, the position of party secretary general has already been declared hereditary. This means that in the socialist system itself there is a gradual transformation into a monarchist system. To do this, it is only necessary to adopt a couple of Politburo resolutions, secret at first. And then everything will go automatically. Lenin wrote that two systems of power are possible in Russia: tsarist or Soviet, which, in accordance with the Marxist theory of the unity of opposites, indicates the possibility of a smooth, I would say, non-revolutionary transition from one system to another.

"You've worked hard," my father said gloomily, "that's what led you to the analogy. And go out into the street and ask about people's monarchism? They will make you laugh, that's all.

— Yes, where does it come from? Sergey was indignant. "People have long forgotten the different terms and formulations there, but in their hearts they remain monarchists, although they consider themselves communists or nothing at all. This idea is in the subconscious of the people.

"In the subconscious of our people," Stepan Agafonovich answered, much to Sergei's surprise, "there is only one idea - survival. Everyone takes advantage of this, imposing monarchism on him, then ... - the old man stammered and added - ... something worse.

- Dad, what are you doing? - Sergey was stunned. - What are you talking about?

"All right," his father waved his hand. - It is not known what can be agreed upon. I remembered how before the war I had to be present at the interrogation of a crazy old man. He assured us that Tsar Nicholas II was not shot, but was kept as a secret consultant, so that with his knowledge he would help the Bolsheviks build a new empire on a socialist basis. And he seemed to agree, recognizing that socialism is a secular embodiment of Orthodox ideas.

And what happened to this old man? Sergei asked. What else did he say?

"Do you know what the mouse said when it met the cat," Stepan Agafonovich asked in his turn without a shadow of a smile.

"I know this old Chekist saying," Sergey answered, "I didn't say anything. Did not make it.

"That's it," said the father. - Few people had time to say anything in those years. They didn't like to listen, as they do now ... They slapped this old man on the same day. The conversation then with everyone was short ...

"Listen, dad," Sergey interrupted his father, "I'm very interested, tell me, does it mean that before the war there were rumors that the tsar was not shot?" Other than this old man, have you heard of such a version?

"There were many different rumors," Stepan Agafonovich answered, "and there were such rumors as this one. As if the former tsar almost goes to Comrade Stalin himself as advisers, because, - the old man laughed, - Comrade Stalin himself is the bastard son of Alexander III, and therefore they are, as it were, brothers. Lenin de wanted to deal with the king for the fact that he ordered his brother to be hanged, and Stalin saved his brother and kept him with him. Can you imagine?

Something has recently changed in his father's reasoning, but what exactly, Sergey really could not understand.

Another surprise awaited him when, having wished his father good night, he went to sleep in his former room, where there were two narrow beds, his and his brother's. Passing through a small hallway, where there was a telephone on a small bedside table, Sergey automatically noticed an envelope lying next to the device, addressed to his father. Glancing at the return address, Sergei was even more surprised. The letter was sent from Leningrad by some Israel Lazarevich Ahriman, who lives in the cradle of three revolutions, on Vasilyevsky Island, to the address. Kamskaya street, house 24. He mechanically, out of professional habit, noted that only the street and the house were indicated on the return address, but there was no apartment number. Kumanin never thought that his father had acquaintances with such sonorous names. My father worked very actively in the Council of Veterans and carried on a large correspondence with almost the entire Union. "You never know with whom he once served." He had a list of veterans in a large red-bound notebook with an image of the Spasskaya Tower of the Kremlin. Falling asleep, Sergey wondered why this letter struck him so much, maybe because of the name of the sender. However, he soon forgot about it. II

Despite the fact that the order given to Major Kumanin did not say anything about the need to conduct any historical research, but was instructed to finally find the burial place of the last tsar and his family after their execution in 1918,

he himself understood his task more as a study, and not as an investigation. But what is the difference between these two concepts? And here and there you have to dig into documents, study sources, look for evidence, interview witnesses, conduct various examinations and the like. The difference was that, as a result, investigations open or close criminal and other cases, and as a result of research, if you're lucky, abstracts and monographs are written, dissertations are defended. Sometimes Kumanin had a vague desire to spit on everything and go somewhere to teach history, no matter what. He could quite professionally teach the history of the USSR at a secondary school, and the history of the CPSU at a university. He was even invited to one of the departments, however, by the hour. But this is for starters, at least in a year and a half it would be possible to defend and become an assistant professor, and there the road to great science would open. And now the thought flashed: "Isn't it time to start a scientific career," but nevertheless he decided to first get to the bottom of the truth. The next morning, Kumanin arrived at the Central Archives of the KGB, located modestly and without a sign in a huge building two blocks from the Lubyanka. In the archive, having carefully checked all the passes and prescriptions, Kumanin was led to a thin, small and wrinkled old man who was sitting in a tiny closet on the ground floor. The appearance of the closet was unpresentable and did not at all fit with the pomposity of the building itself, made of concrete and glass in the style of architecture of the late Brezhnev period. The archivist was dressed in an army shirt without a tie and in uniform, but rather wrinkled trousers.

Are you writing a dissertation? he asked, having familiarized himself with the Kumanin prescriptions. - If you write, then I must disappoint you. We, my dear, only keep documents after 1954. And everything that was before is in another place. You need to go to the Kaluga highway to the ring road. There are all the documents of an earlier period, although there are mainly documents from SMERSH from the time of the war collected. And on the issue of interest to you, it is better to look for something in ordinary historical archives. Recently, a writer appeared on TV. So he dug up everything for his book in the university library.

"I have a slightly different task," Kumanin explained, "so..."

"I understand," the old man said, "but I want to tell you honestly, you won't find anything here. We don't have to look for it, not in our department. The people in Yekaterinburg who took care of the tsar and his family, by and large, were not even Chekists, if we approach this issue formally. They represented local councils. Then, much was kept in the archives of the NKVD. Later, in 1941, when the People's Commissariat was divided, everything was transferred to the archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. And yes, I highly doubt it. I repeat that those people in Yekaterinburg did not belong to our department. In modern terms, they were direct representatives of the top party leadership of the country. Rather, the materials of interest to you should be sought in the party archives.

According to the phrase "they were engaged in the king and his family," the old man immediately guessed the former prosecutor of the SMERSH military tribunals, who had dealt with more than one thousand people in his life, and now was sent to live out in archival dust.

The Kaluga highway trembled from the rumble of multi-ton trucks racing against the backdrop of some unfinished construction sites, and cranes frozen in various poses, like petrified prehistoric monsters. There was a terrible heat, especially sharply felt because of the dust raised by cars. The branch of the KGB archive was located in a squat two-story building surrounded by a high (almost flush with the roof) solid concrete fence with iron gates decorated with red stars of the military department. A bell was built into the tightly closed door of the checkpoint, exposing a tiny button to the light of God. Wiping his sweaty face with a handkerchief, Kumanin pressed this button. I had to press five more times before a small window opened in the door, which Kumanin did not notice, and in it the sternly red, displeased face of the ensign appeared.

He was silent, but his face seemed to express: "Well, why are you ringing? What do you want?". Kumanin showed his ID. With the same expression on his face, the ensign opened the door, let Sergei into the checkpoint, from there he led him into a side room where there was a table and a couple of veteran chairs, asked him to wait, muttering: "Actually, we're having lunch," and apparently went to call someone.

On the shabby table lay several issues of the newspaper Pravda and Krasnaya Zvezda for the month before last. All of them were filled with messages about the upcoming withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. Kumanin by association remembered that he had not received any news from his brother for a long time, and he had not asked his father yesterday, being carried away by a completely empty conversation over evening tea.

About forty minutes later, a senior lieutenant appeared, apologized: "We are having lunch," carefully looked through all Kumanin's documents.

"The paperwork is wrong, Comrade Major," he said. - Today I will let you through, but you in the Office will issue a special relationship specifically for our archive with a full list of problems that interest you. The attitude must be signed by one of the deputy chairmen and the head of the Department. It must be accompanied by a certificate of your admission. We have an order from Deputy Chairman Glushko to tighten access to documents of national importance, even for existing employees.

Then the officer took Kumanin to the administrative building, where he was to go up to the second floor to room 205.

In the building, as it should be in the archive, there was a screeching silence, broken only by the distant chirping of a typewriter.

On the door of room 205 hung a sign "Deputy. Head of Science, Colonel Naumenko M.T. Some archives are managed by directors, and some by chiefs. There is no system.

Colonel Naumenko, despite the heat, was dressed in a well-tailored suit and tie. One could feel the training of the mid-70s, when the absence of a tie on any employee was considered a major disciplinary violation.

"Come in, major," he greeted Kumanin. - Sit down. I have already reported to the CP. How can we be useful?

Kumanin briefly outlined the essence of the task assigned to him.

"We don't have anything," said the deputy. according to science - and never was, I dare to assure you. Several people have already approached us on this issue, although they do not have permission. But when interest in these events began to revive, I instructed the employees to look through the inventories of cases, since I assumed that the central office might also be interested in the issue. So, we have in storage only the materials of the investigative case for the search for the so-called royal treasures. Are you up to date?

Although Kumanin had a vague idea about the royal treasures, he nodded, and thought to himself whether he could suggest to Klimov to entrust this task to Colonel Naumenko, who would have unearthed everything that was needed in an instant. He is the master in this archive and in all others, for sure, he has his own. But Sergei knew perfectly well what Klimov would say in response: "Kumanin, if you refuse to complete the assignment, then write an official report on the transfer to the economic unit. In our country, everyone does his part of the work: you - yours, Colonel Naumenko - yours, not to mention the fact that he, unlike you, does not obey me.

May I have a look at these documents? Kumanin asked.

"Unfortunately, no," Colonel Naumenko answered in an intelligent manner. "The fact is that we do not give out the original documents to anyone. At present, even applications from the office of the President of the USSR are only carried out in photocopies or microfilms. Cassettes with microfilms of just this group of documents were sent to your Office quite recently at the request, if I am not mistaken, of General Klimov. You probably know him?"

Kumanin silently nodded.

"The documents are old," Naumenko continued. "If all of them are procrastinated, then soon there will be nothing left of them at all. You understand?"

"Comrade Colonel," Kumanin asked, "but in what archive can one find materials related to the execution in Yekaterinburg?"

"I suppose they should be looked for not in Moscow, but in Sverdlovsk," suggested Naumenko, "of course, there may be something in Moscow. As I was told, it was with these documents that the so-called "Special Folder of the Politburo" began. Surely you have heard of this "folder"?"

"I heard," Kumanin confirmed, "but I thought it was just the highest level of secrecy."

"Quite right," the Colonel nodded his head. - This is not a "folder". It takes up about three times more space than our archive. If you want to know what really happened then in Yekaterinburg and who is responsible for it, then you need government documents. However, if you have been working in our system for quite a long time, you should understand that the party does not trust all of its secrets to our archives.

Kumanin was let into the central party archive without a word. The police officers standing there, at the sight of his certificate, famously saluted him. After that, he appeared before an imposing lady, noticeably tinted, but in a strict black suit and a white blouse with an elegant tie, which made an impression no less than that of Colonel Naumenko.

The lady turned the Kumanin identity card in her hands, briefly glanced at the order and said in a low, precise voice, as if she were speaking from a podium in front of a party activist:

- For admission to documents before 1941, permission from the General Department of the Central Committee in relation to your leadership is required. The attitude must be signed by the head of the Department of the political agency and the party organizer.

Rightly believing that he would not even be allowed to enter the archive of the Ministry of Internal Affairs due to the antagonism between the two departments (they will always find something to complain about), Kumanin returned to the Lubyanka in the evening and reported everything to General Klimov, whom, fortunately, he found still on the spot .

- They won't let you? Klimov asked. Do you think it's because of the secrecy? No. They all got lazy. It's just that no one wants to mess around with you, climb into funds, look for something. Lived up! An operative worker is not allowed into his native archive, but they hang all sorts of noodles on his ears. They have only one hope, that you will be too lazy to draw up all these papers and relationships and you will spit and leave them alone.

The general picked up the phone.

"Naumenko," he said, "are you chasing my major like a boy?" What's comrade

general"? You must have copies of all reports on this case. Where did they take it? Look, I'll check. Colonel Naumenko was still talking on the phone. Klimov listened grimacing, leafing through the desk calendar and inserting his remarks from time to time: "Did I order? And did you send it? Microfilm... Interesting... First time I've heard... Okay, let's figure it out. He hung up the receiver and raised his eyes to Kumanin.

— What do you hope to find in the archives? Everything that could be found there has long been published. Read literature. You have a safe full of it...

"Comrade General," said Kumanin, "resolve the issue."

"Well," Klimov leaned back wearily in his chair.

"Colonel Naumenko said that you requested some microfilms on the search for royal treasures," he began.

— So what? Klimov asked with some bewilderment.

"Could I get acquainted with them," Kumanin asked, not quite confidently.

- What did I order you? Looking for royal treasures? - feigning irritation, growled the general. - I instructed you to find the place of burial of the remains, and you climb through the archives. Do you expect to find the remains there?

"Allow me to report," Kumanin objected. - For example, the remains of Hitler, as you know, are stored in the archive. Why shouldn't the remains of the Romanovs be there too? By the way, according to one of the versions, Yurovsky brought the heads of those executed in alcohol to the Kremlin. Maybe somewhere in the most forbidden funds they are stored.

- Curious, - Klimov looked at the major with interest, - continue.

"That's what I thought," continued Kumanin, "where Hitler's remains are stored, there are several more cardboard boxes with different seals. Some have seals from the 1920s. What can they contain?

"Interesting," the general chuckled, "when did you manage to visit this vault?"

"I was still a senior lieutenant," Kumanin said, "when I and several other junior officers were included in the commission for some archival inventory. We dragged boxes and boxes with archival documents. We were included in the commission for this, to be used as loaders. We did not sign any acts. This was done for us by General Mylin and two colonels. So, when we were carrying these boxes, one of the archival workers said: "Do you know, guys, what is in this box? Skull of Hitler.

- I would these talkers ... - began Klimov, but restrained himself and asked: - In short. What do you suggest?

"First of all," suggested Kumanin, "check all the other boxes in this vault.

Who will let us in there? the general asked. "Today you walked through the archives, saw how our brother was greeted there.

"You said," Kumanin dared to remind, "that the matter is under the control of the Politburo. If this is their task, let them give us access to all archives and repositories.

"As you wish," Klimov smiled, "but I wouldn't go into these vaults, even if

they let me in there. There you can find out that you won't live a day later. The "Special Folder" is all computerized. Of those who were involved in this, I mean bibliographers and technicians, no one received any awards, except for the fact that the Manager of the Central Committee was personally involved in their funeral. Do you understand? If there - the general pointed his finger up - wanted to rummage in their bosoms, they would have discovered in six seconds what was stored under their noses. So, either there is nothing there, or they want us to look for everything we need in Sverdlovsk. Therefore, I am very surprised that you did not fly there this morning, but began a trip through the archives. Won't you tell me why?

— Because I won't find anything in Sverdlovsk. If there was anything to be found, it would have been found long ago. They were looking not only for Schelokov and Ryabchenko, but also for groups of local historians and various informal groups. I'm not talking about our colleagues, who have all the local archives at their disposal. Why am I going there, Comrade General? Digging for the hundredth time in old mines and quarries? The key to everything lies not there, but here, in Moscow. Only here you can find out about the place of burial. And only then, if necessary, you can fly to Sverdlovsk or anywhere. You advised me to read literature. I, let me tell you, have been doing almost nothing else for the last ten years. How much I read on this issue, not a single academician dreamed ...

"Well, you are a braggart," the general was surprised. "Not a single academician ever dreamed of!" Fine. While studying the tapes. Don't poke your head into the archives without my order...

At that moment, one of the telephones clustered in a herd on the side table rang piercingly. Klimov picked up the phone.

"Temperature," he asked, "what is it?" Thirty-nine is the third day. What are you reporting now? Thought? You think ... you know ... Where can I get you a pediatrician? I don't have them. Tell Captain Afonin that I'm surprised. He seems to have graduated from the academy ... So what, what is a child?

Klimov waved farewell to Kumanin. He left the office.

III

"Owls. secret

April 12, 1922

Deputy Chairman of the OPTU

comrade Unshlikht.

Continuing the development of the source, it was possible to establish the following: the source showed that in 1918, at the first stage, in preparation for further transportation, the place of which was not known to the source at that time, measures were taken to save and preserve some items of material significance. For this, a number of persons were involved, on whom, according to the source, one could rely, although without any guarantee. The names of these persons are attached. Their current whereabouts are unknown.

Senior Operative Commissioner of the OPTU

Lisitsyn A.E."

"Owls. Secret

April 23, 1922

Deputy Chairman of the OGPU

comrade Unshlikht.

In addition to the previous report of April 12, G.

The source suggests, in order to simplify the search, to submit a personally written demand to the indicated persons, if they can be found.

Senior Operative Commissioner of the OGPU Lisitsyn A.

"Owls. secret

Comrade Lisitsyn

Try to get the source to remember any additional details regarding these individuals. Can you imagine how many Vasilyevs are in Russia?

Regards, Unshlikht.

"Owls. Secret

May 3, 1922

Deputy Chairman of the OGPU

comrade Unshlikhtu

The source had been ill with Spanish flu. In connection with the prohibition of the admission of medical personnel, the disease proceeded severely. The eldest daughter has little medical experience. No work has been done.

Senior Operative Commissioner of the OGPU Lisitsyn A.E.

"Owls. Secret

December 7, 1922

Deputy Chairman of the OGPU

comrade Unshlikhtu

Comrade constantly works with the source. Artuzov. Given the state of (the source's) health, it is quite impossible for me to consistently work at the present time. line of my task. The vast majority of the time has to be spent on the needs of economic support.

Senior officer of the OGPU Lisitsyn.

"Owls. secret

August 15, 1923

Chairman of the OGPU

comrade Menzhinsky

After the tragic events known to you, the source resolutely refuses to talk to Comrade Artuzov and me, believing that we have something to do with these events. He asks the priest, which he was denied. Is it possible to pick up a reliable comrade to come to the site under the guise of a priest? This is a matter of very great importance.

Senior about / authorized OGPU Lisitsyn AE "

"Owls. secret

January 4, 1924

Your instruction has been completed. Concerning the clergyman Innokenty (Ivanenko S.D.), it was done according to your instructions. He has no relatives.

Senior officer of the OGPU Lisitsyn.

"Owls. secret

June 5, 1924

Deputy Chairman of the OGPU

comrade Yagoda.

Some of the books have been received by us, including two of the five albums requested by the source. I ask you to take measures to find the remaining three albums, which may be in Petrograd. It is necessary to start harvesting firewood for the winter. I expect to start working with the source again in the near future.

Senior officer of the OGPU Lisitsyn.

"Owls. secret

August 18, 1924

Deputy Chairman of the OGPU

comrade Unshlikht (handwritten).

It seems to me that we cannot demand from the source more than what he can know. The circumstances were such that some details might simply be unknown to him. My opinion is that the source, despite his political limitations, prejudice and serious illness, is currently giving sincere information. I would not like to cross the known limits of pressure, because in this case we risk

know nothing at all.

Senior officer of the OGPU Lisitsyn.

"Owls. secret

Comrade Lisitsyn.

Speaking of increased pressure, we had in mind the creation of some restrictions in the regime of detention (deprivation of books, reduction of rations, insufficient heating of the premises), but in no case physical measures, which are strictly prohibited, as well as rough treatment. Such measures can be threatened, but in a very cautious form, only in relation to other persons who are in the position of a source. And then only as a last resort.

Regards, Menzhinsky" (undated).

"Owls. secret

February 7, 1925

Chairman of the OGPU for the Urals

comrade Balitsky.

We inform you that in 1918, during the stay of the former royal family of the Romanovs in Tobolsk, with the help of Bishop Barnabas, he was admitted to the house of the former imperial family. the priest of the Tobolsk Annunciation Church Alexei Vasiliev, who performed religious rites for the royal family and at the time of their preliminary expulsion was a confessor who had the right to enter the arrest room. A. Vasiliev soon gained confidence and enjoyed great prestige with the royal family. Before shipping b. royal family from Tobolsk, when the latter began to worry about the preservation of their values, byv. Tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna instructed the indicated A. Vasiliev to take out a suitcase with diamonds and other valuables. With the assistance of the then chief of security, Colonel Kobylinsky, and the servant Nikolai Romanov, Alexander Petrovich Kirpichnikov, the valuables in the leather suitcase were carried out by Vasiliev from the guarded house. Later, A.P. Kirpichnikov also removed a sword in a golden sheath with a pure gold handle from the guarded premises, which he also had to transfer to A. Vasiliev. The former servant in the arrest house, Mezhas Paulina (possibly Gasparovna or Kasparovna), was also related to this case. Take measures to search for and arrest these persons, whose interrogation should not be carried out without an authorized representative from Moscow.

Regards, Unshlikht.

"Owls. Secret

March 20, 1925

Comrade Lisitsyn.

Could you be more precise: Mezhanec - Paulina or Polina? To give, at least in general terms, her verbal portrait, as well as the verbal portrait of Kirpichnikov A.P.

Deputy Chairman of the OPTU Unshlikht.

Kumanin switched off the apparatus. He looked through no more than a fifth of the reel of microfilm, but his eyes were already hurting and he was feeling sleepy. General Klimov was absent for the second day, and Klimov worked in a room adjacent to his reception room. Sometimes he went to the reception room to chat with the "ensign" Svetlana, who served as a clerk-typist. Svetlana was friendly, but extremely taciturn, which was easily explained: the general liked to load his secretaries with work above his head. His previous secretary, Katya Malinina, became ill right at work. She was taken to the hospital, where she died the same day from sepsis due to advanced purulent appendicitis, as stated in the medical report. They buried her with the whole Administration. Klimov himself, in a black cloak and a hat that he held in his hands, looked very upset. Kumanin heard him say to General Abashvili, who was standing nearby: "Here it is - our service! At 32, people can't stand it!" Abashvili only shook his gray head in dismay.

Sitting in the waiting room, in order to take a break from work and the closeness of the adjacent premises, Kumanin was quickly weaned off by employees of various departments who often dropped in here. Each of them, at the sight of Sergei, considered it his duty to say something like: "Kumanin, are you now His Excellency's adjutant?" or "Sveta, is he assigned to help you?"

Having had a snack in the buffet with a bun with a glass of yogurt, Kumanin again undertook to unwind the reel of film. Flashed copies of endless documents. Basically, these were reports from the senior detective Lisitsyn again about the lack of firewood, with a demand to send a volume of speeches by Koni's lawyer, either reporting on the invasion of the facility by rats, or making an inquiry about the date of opening the Trinity Bridge in St. Petersburg. The answers to him were always signed by the highest ranks of the then OPTU: Unshlikht, Yagoda, less often Menzhinsky himself. Sometimes they asked Lisitsyn to clarify some names, dates and explain vague events. As in a kaleidoscope, the dates flashed by: 1926, 1927, 1928. Having reached 1933, Kumanin decided to rest again, mainly to think over what he had read.

Correspondence of the senior detective Lisitsyn with the leadership of the OGPU, apparently, concerned the search for the so-called "royal treasures", but it was not clear what Lisitsyn had to do with all this. It is not clear where Lisitsyn and his mysterious "sources" were located. Apparently, somewhere very far from Moscow. In some remote, provincial prison or zone. In the documents there was never even a hint of Lisitsyn's whereabouts, and, if it were not for the constant reminders of firewood, one might have thought that he was abroad. But the OGPU did not supply foreign points with firewood. It is possible, of course, that the word "firewood" meant something completely different. True, several documents were interspersed in this flow of correspondence that directly related to the royal treasures. They were no longer sent to Lisitsyn, but to the leadership of the OGPU, the Ural comrades, who must find someone for this purpose and report on the operational-search measures taken. Kumanin interrupted work on a document without a date or an addressee, apparently written in mid-1933:

"Owls. secret.

As it turned out, the sword in a golden sheath with a handle made of pure gold was handed over by A.P. Kirpichnikov for safekeeping to Alexei Vasilyev, who hid it first in the chimney, and then under the porch of the Annunciation Church. Operational-search

The events made it possible to establish that in 1929 or 1930, Alexei Vasiliev, together with his wife Lidia Ivanovna, left Tobolsk for the city of Omsk to visit his son Alexander, who left Tobolsk back in 1922-23. On the way, Alexei Vasilyev at the station. Tara is dead. The remaining valuables are kept by Vasilyeva's wife Lidia Ivanovna and son Al. Alekseevich living in the city of Omsk. These values are partly spent by them. For example: several pieces of diamond necklaces, rings and bracelets were sold to a former large merchant, a merchant of the city of Tobolsk, Konstantin Ivanovich Pechekos, who, in addition, bought gold coins and items from other people and who disappeared two or three years ago. Other participants in this case were found and taken into custody: Mezhang Paulina and a nun of the Ivanovo Monastery Marfa Uzhintseva. The search continues.

Beginning IVF PP OPTU in the Urals Samoilov.

Beginning 8th Department of IVF Shumkov.

Thus, a chain was built up: operas Lisitsyn - Lubyanka - Ural. Mysterious triangle.

Turning off the apparatus, Kumanin went to a special unit, which consisted of idlers keeping a chronicle of the organs. They dug up some cases in the archives, "polished" them, sometimes shoveled them in the "necessary" direction, in order to then transfer them to writers thirsting for fame or to the press.

"Historians" were also not very allowed to secret archival files, so they basically rewrote something interesting, in their opinion, from various closed and semi-closed magazines, such as the VChK Bulletin, published under the heading "For official use", otherwise and without a neck at all. The actions of this unit, which was led by Lieutenant Colonel Lavrov, were practically not controlled by anyone, and they constantly threatened to disperse it. As a result, this department in torment was transformed into a department of the KGB (and then the MB and the FSK) in connection with the press. Now for the currency they began to feed their fairy tales to the West and, first of all, the United States. Everyone is saved from overclocking as best they can. The states of "historians" were constantly expanding. The office turned into a kind of sump, where they transferred everyone who was no longer possible to keep on operational work for various reasons, and it was not worth expelling or imprisoning. "Historians" worked in accordance with the strictest instructions, which said that they would curse the hour of their birth if even one word of truth about the activities of the organs for all seventy years of their heroic existence was named in the press or in some brisk book, or at least one was named. real surname, except officially permitted. The officially authorized ones included: Dzerzhinsky, Menzhinsky, Yagoda, Yezhov, Beria and Andropov. Vsevolod Merkulov was sometimes allowed to be mentioned, sometimes not. The same thing happened with Abakumov, Serov, Semichastny, Shelepin. With the names of the lower echelon, the situation was even worse. Lavrov constantly compiled lists and wore them for approval, as a result, over the years, a unique card file of former employees of the Cheka, OGPU, NKVD, MGB and KGB appeared in the historical department. Actually, mindful of this card file, Kumanin went to the "historians", hoping to find out something about the personality of the mysterious senior opera Lisitsyn A.E. The unit, as usual, was completely empty, except for the elderly Major Nikitin, constantly chewing coffee beans in order to disguise the steady port exhaust, which no longer depended on whether Nikitin drank or not today. At one time, he was a capable, as they were assured, intelligence agent, he worked in various European countries under a diplomatic roof. But the pernicious passion for alcohol led to the fact that Nikitin was recalled to Moscow, they even wanted to judge, but the "hairy paws" covered the Chekist and sent him to serve in the historical department. Even the high bosses couldn't do more for him. Many people, especially young specialists, openly laughed at Nikitin, but he was not offended. Nikitin was not "shit", to use the working slang of operatives.

"Hello," Kumanin said, entering the "historians" room, "is Lavrov in?"

Nikitin sat at the table and dozed, putting before him some old case, on the cover of which large letters were crowded: NKVD of the USSR.

"He's not here," Nikitin yawned, "he's instructing writers somewhere." The rest of the archives scattered in all directions.

Why do you need Lavrov? Nikitin asked Kumanin. - You can have a drink with me, if
Want.

"You should drink everything," Kumanin answered him in a tone, "but who will work?"

"We work like convicts," Nikitin slammed the folder shut. - Ordered by the 91st year, that is, the fiftieth anniversary of the perfidious attack on us by the Nazis, to collect information on our people for posthumous awarding them the title of Hero, those who revealed Hitler's plan and warned our command. We have already dug up about fifty of them. We dig in the file cabinet around the clock. I'm allergic to dust. They say that before the war archival workers were given 100 grams a day for prevention.

"They gave them nine grams," Kumanin interrupted him, "I heard that. As for prevention, from my point of view, this one is the best. After nine grams, the head will never hurt again.

"Your humor is kind of black," Nikitin scowled. Do you have business with us or just come to chat?

"Nikitin," Kumanin asked, "be a friend, find me one pre-war man in your file cabinet."

- Give the application, as expected, - the ex-intelligence officer answered, - with the signature of the head of the department, Lavrov ordered. He then shows these applications to the head of the Department, when he calls us parasites.

- What will I write an application for one person? cried Kumanin, knowing that Nikitin was very fond of such a tone of address. - Be a man, it's a matter of minutes.

- Minute! Nikitin grumbled. "Do you know how many people like you run in a day?" You won't be able to sit down. And if only someone would say thank you. What's your last name?

- Lisitsyn, - Kumanin reported, - Lisitsyn A.E. Was a senior opera in the 20s - 30s.

— Lisitsyn? repeated the "historian". - Lisitsyn, you say? Let's see. You have a bottle.

— What conversations! Kumanin hastened to assure.

Nikitin went up to the doors of a huge closet, closed with a padlock, pulled them apart like blinds, behind which there appeared such a number of catalog boxes that some respectable departmental library could envy.

Kumanin drew attention to the fact that the boxes are marked with all the letters of the Russian and Latin alphabets. There was even a box marked with a hard sign. He wanted to inquire about the names that begin with a hard sign, but said nothing: each unit has its own little tricks.

Meanwhile, Nikitin, burrowing into a box with the letter "L", muttered:

"So, Livy... Lidman... Lizhanin... Lipenko... Aha, there he is!" Lisitsyn Alexander Efimovich, born in 1897.

He took a card out of the drawer and said with some sadness in his voice:

- They slapped your Lisitsyn in February 1941 as an enemy of the working people. No one applied for rehab. Served in the central office. Since 1940 - captain of state security. That is, he wore four sleepers of an army colonel and was a big man. In what department he worked - is unknown, we do not know. There is a red star here. This means that Lisitsyn is not his real name ...

- And the real one? Kumanin asked.

"Ask me something easier," Nikitin grunted, "I remembered my last name when I fell into that hole."

Kumanin did not need to explain this. Even spinning among the monarchists and other members of the public, he was hiding under the name of Sergei Ivanovich Korshunov. The real surname opera is very expensive!

How can you find out his real name? Kumanin asked.

- This is only through the Personnel Department, - Nikitin explained, - and then, if they have the necessary archival files. Why the hell do you want his real name? He may not even know her. Since he got into our card as Lisitsyn, it means that he was listed under this surname. And perhaps only one iron Felix knew the real one. This Lisitsyn from 1918 - a powerful man, apparently, was a peasant, he held out until 1941. Everyone who started in the 18th was liquidated by 1934.

"Indeed," thought Kumanin, "why do I need his real name? More importantly, what was this person doing in our system?" He already wanted to take advantage of Klimov's instructions and go to the Personnel Department, but then he changed his mind and decided to wait for Klimov's return. Returning to the general's waiting room, Kumanin handed over the microfilm to Svetlana and decided to go home two hours before the official end of work.

IV

Arriving home, Kumanin discovered that the piece of bread that remained in the breadbasket had already turned into a moldy cracker. The fridge was empty except for an old (and half-empty) bottle of Bulgarian ketchup and one bottle of beer. I thought about going to the store, but remembered that he did not have coupons. After the introduction of coupons for basic types of food, in order to discourage visitors from Moscow grocery stores, the shops were completely empty and it was absolutely hopeless to go there. The KGB, in order to protect its employees from the next "temporary difficulties", in addition to the already existing network of special distributors, deployed additional food stores under the Directorate, where employees could buy plentifully and without fuss. The family, of course, did this regularly, and the frivolous bachelors, to which Sergei belonged, constantly forgot to look there during the working day and, having arrived home, were sometimes forced to starve until the morning. Bread, however, was still sold without coupons, but since there were constant interruptions in its delivery, gigantic queues lined up in the bakeries, sweeping out all the goods before dinner. The rest of the day the bakeries were empty, as in the days of war communism, collectivization, World War II and post-war devastation. True, no one has yet been trampled to death in the bread lines, as in vodka lines. And although Gorbachev's anti-alcohol terror was already on the wane, a bottle of vodka in Moscow was just as hard to get as

canned lobsters.

Kumanin remembered a bottle of vodka in connection with the upcoming birthday of his father. For him, this was not a big problem, but still it was necessary to take care of it in advance, not today, of course.

Kumanin decided not to go to the store. I found a half-forgotten packet of cookies and an almost full can of coffee in the kitchen cabinet. "Quite long enough to live until morning."

Everything that he managed to learn about Lisitsyn's opera did not cause any strong emotions in Kumanin. And the fact that this man was shot in the 41st year, and that Lisitsyn is a working pseudonym, and not a surname, was in the order of things, one might say, a way of life that several generations had become accustomed to. It would be surprising if it were suddenly possible to establish that Lisitsyn, in the rank of major general, holding the position of head of the KGB somewhere in Arkhangelsk, went on a well-deserved rest in the year 60, died five years ago and was buried with honor on the site of the local cemetery. Then a lot of questions would involuntarily arise, and above all, how did he manage to survive at all stages of building first just socialism, and then developed socialism?

Instinctively feeling that it was Lisitsyn who was the key to completing the task of General Klimov, Kumanin was even a little delighted, although nothing particularly mysterious has yet been discovered in the fate of the mysterious "senior opera". Everything, like everyone else. Perhaps it will be possible to find out the rest: what issues this Lisitsyn solved and where he worked.

In any case, after Klimov's return, he will have something to report to the general and what to ask him about.

Thinking in this way, Kumanin lay on the couch in a tracksuit, trying to decide what to do. Not every day I managed to get home so early. It was only the beginning of the seventh evening. I thought about going to Luzhniki, where Dynamo played with Spartak, but I realized - laziness. In the end, he decided not to think about Lisitsyn anymore, but to spend the evening like this, lying on the sofa and watching TV.

From the state of complete "relaxation" Kumanin brought a phone call. Sergei cursed. A phone call could mean an urgent call to the Office, which now was not wanted more than death.

Without opening his eyes, Kumanin lowered his hand and picked up the phone that was on the floor: "I'm listening..."

"Seryozha," he heard his father's voice, "are you sick?" What's at home so early?

- He ran away from work, dad, - Kumanin laughed, - while the authorities are all on the road. Resting.

"You'll finish the game," Stepan Agafonovich warned in a displeased voice, "they will transfer to firemen ...

"Then Moscow will definitely burn down again," Sergey laughed, his mood lifted from the very fact that his father was calling, and not someone from work.

"All right," his father coughed into the phone. - I'm calling for this reason: I'm leaving Moscow for a while, so don't worry. You have the keys. Take out the mail, and water the flowers at least once a week.

- Where are you going? Sergey didn't understand. - Is your birthday on Saturday? People will come...

"We'll do it next time," Kumanin Sr. sighed. - People will get killed. Yes, I have already warned almost everyone that I will leave. I need to see someone.

"Where are you going, can you tell me?" Sergey insisted. - Where and how much?

- Yes, you see, - said the father, as it seemed to Sergey, not quite confident in his voice, - we haven't seen each other for a long time. Consider, after the war... I'll tell you later. Kiss. Bye.

This "kiss" was completely unexpected. For as long as Sergei could remember, his father had never kissed him on the phone. In life, everything seems to be twice. Once on the occasion of graduation from the institute, and the second after the extraordinary assignment of the rank of major.

Kumanin held the handset for some time, beeping with short beeps, then raised the device on his stomach and dialed his father's number, intending to offer to give Stepan Agafonovich a lift to the station and find out his father's plans in more detail. The phone didn't answer. Sergei hung up and dialed the number again. Long beeps and no one. "It turns out that the father did not call from home." Sergei put the phone back on the floor, lay down a little more with his eyes open. The call from his father brought him out of his relaxed state. "Where did he go to? Probably some regular veteran cases. Old Chekists love to come up with their own next secret tasks. Everyone is looking for someone, investigating something, sending encrypted letters to each other. As children. Father, apparently, called from the Council of Veterans.

Kumanin got up and went to the kitchen to make himself some coffee and nibble on some biscuits. He was on his third biscuit when the phone in the room rang again. At first, Sergei decided not to approach. "Where can he be?" But then I thought, what if it was my father calling again, and decided to pick up the phone.

"Seryozha," he heard a woman's voice. "It's good that I caught you. Listen, is it okay that I'll come to you in an hour? Do you have time?"

It was Nadia Shestakova, with whom he once studied in the same class. She didn't call Sergei for probably a year. Deciding that tonight was an evening full of surprises, Kumanin replied:

"Very glad to hear from you, Nadyusha. Of course, come. And what happened?"

"Not on the phone," Nadia replied in a standard Soviet phrase. - I'll come and tell you.

Phones of all operational workers were tapped (for their own safety and control). This was known to everyone who worked in the system. We have heard a lot of sad folklore on this subject.

But no one knew for sure whether their apartments were being tapped. Kumanin himself more than once had to place listening systems in different rooms. By the difficulty with which they were discharged, what a shortage existed for the so-called special equipment, some illusion was created that no one would spend expensive equipment on you. However, no one was completely sure. However, is it really possible in our time to be sure of anything at all. Even the insurance policy, to which Ostap Bender referred, cannot give any guarantee now. Therefore, it remained to rely on the old rule: "Do not talk on the phone, a talker is a godsend for a spy."

Kumanin had an affair with Nadya Shestakova while still at school, which, like most school romances, turned out to be completely innocent and ended in nothing.

Later, when Sergei entered MGIMO, their paths diverged. It was not without the influence of Kumanin Sr., who apparently dreamed after the appointment of his son in such a prestigious

University, about the party, like Captain Churbanov, who, as you know, married the daughter of Comrade Brezhnev himself, becoming a lieutenant general in a week. Subsequently, the sad fate of Brezhnev's son-in-law somewhat cooled the ambitions of Stepan Agafonovich, and he stopped making plans for noble brides, and once asked: "Something Nadya hasn't called for a long time? Did you quarrel?"

They didn't quarrel. It's just that those who study at MGIMO do not have affairs with girls from the pedagogical school, where Nadia went to study after school.

They met much later and under very unexpected circumstances - in one of the capital's orphanages (namely, shelters, not orphanages), where orphans were kept up to seven years old, strange disappearances were noted. The investigation of the criminal case initiated by the prosecutor's office revealed a picture that could well become the scenario of a good "horror" film. For various reasons, children were transferred to nonresident shelters, but in these institutions, for some reason, children quickly died for various reasons: from pneumonia, an accident, for example, as a result of a fall from a ladder or from an exercise equipment. That's what the documents said, the registration cards and the death certificates. Selective exhumations revealed a clear forgery - the graves were either empty, or the remains of long-dead adults rested there. It was impossible to refer to cremation, since in most of the provincial towns where the orphanages were located, there were no crematoria at all.

Stubborn investigators from the prosecutor's office and the criminal investigation department eventually established that the orphans were taken to a closed clinic, hidden under a mailbox number, like some kind of missile factory or laboratory for the production of chemical or biological weapons. The prosecutor's office investigator was not allowed into the clinic, although he arrived with an order from the USSR Prosecutor General's Office, accompanied by two police officers. The KGB got involved. Members of the 5th Directorate, whom even their own superiors considered slackers at heart, were often called upon to assist other units. They froze in the cordon along with employees of the 9th Security Directorate during some holidays or visits to the capital of important persons, conducted surveillance together with employees of the 7th Directorate, conducted searches and detentions with colleagues from the 3rd Directorate.

Kumanin, then a senior lieutenant, was attached to Major Mironov from the 8th Directorate "to assist the investigation." Together with him, Sergei went to the shelter, and there he met Nadia again. She worked as a teacher and, as it turned out later, was the first to raise the alarm about the strange disappearance of children.

As a result, the prosecutor's office and the police were removed from the investigation, the KGB took the case into their own hands and after a while stopped it "due to the lack of corpus delicti." True, the director of the shelter was removed from her post "for omissions in her work," but later surfaced in some "non-dusty" position in the regional committee of the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions.

All Kumanin's participation in this matter was expressed in the fact that he drove Major Mironov and several other senior officers in a state-owned car twice to the shelter and once to that mysterious clinic where one colonel from the 9th Directorate was admitted, and the rest were waiting in the car. A positive, if I may say so, aspect of this investigative case was the renewal of the affair with Nadya Shestakova.

The novel was already far from being as innocent as at school, but it also did not lead to any result.

Nadia loved her work without memory, rather not work, but the unfortunate orphans given to her care. She spent days and nights in the orphanage.

Kumanin only walked along the government corridors a couple of times, and his head immediately began to crack from children's cries and fuss, from the specific smell characteristic of all Soviet institutions of public charity, and from some vague feeling of anxiety. How can one love such work, he was completely incomprehensible.

The second stage of the affair with Nadia, which had begun rapidly, began to quickly subside, since neither Sergei nor Nadezhda had enough time for its development - both had, as they say, an irregular working day. However, Sergei began to notice that Nadia was not eager to spend her rare free hours with him. She, invariably in a friendly tone, answered his calls with a refusal, referring either to household chores, or to some friends with whom she supposedly had already agreed to spend time today, and to other defensive reasons that all women put forward in response to unwanted claims of men. Once Sergei decided to use heavy artillery. Having waited for Nadia's birthday, he bought a huge bouquet of flowers, a bottle of champagne, took two tickets to the Bolshoi Theater from the office of the Directorate (a privilege that any junior officer could use once every two months, but Kumanin had never used before) and, without an invitation, rushed to Hope home. He found the girl with her parents (very nice old men) and a couple of girlfriends. They drank homemade liquor and laughed loudly at something. Girlfriends shot at him with their eyes, and Nadia herself only smiled sweetly. Kumanin, who knew her well, saw that the girl was far from delighted with his sudden intrusion. It turned out that Nadia needed to return to the shelter for the night, and Kumanin undertook to give her a lift. In a taxi on the way between them there was a conversation that Kumanin would like to forget, but could not. Quite uncomplexed by virtue of his profession, he immediately took, as they say, the bull by the horns:

"I love you," Sergey said to Nadia, "and I will be happy if you become my wife."

Nadia sat in silence for a while. Then, worrying, she began to talk about the fact that it is unlikely that Sergei will be satisfied with his wife, who disappears day and night at work, which she loves and does not want to give up. Apparently, she was taken by surprise by Kumanin's decisive attack and put forward such unconvincing arguments in order to calm down. She even said some official phrase that children are the future of our Motherland and the fate of the country in twenty or thirty years depends largely on their upbringing. She immediately reminded Kumanin that his father had also been brought up in one of these boarding schools. It turned out to be not quite a typical reaction of a woman who had just declared her love.

"From all this," Kumanin said with a sigh, "only one conclusion can be drawn: I don't suit you as your future husband. In other words, you don't love me. It is good that at least some clarity has been achieved on this issue.

"Seryozha," Nadia turned to him, and he noticed the matte sheen of her moist eyes in the twilight of the car, "I really like you. There was a moment when I was very in love with you, very much. And now ... - She broke off and continued in a more firm voice: - But I will not become your wife. Never...

- Why? Sergey almost growled. "Just please don't talk about children again. Children are not the reason.

The declaration of love was already turning into something remotely resembling an interrogation.

"All right," Nadya replied, "I'll tell you why, if you promise that you won't be offended by me." I treat you very well, and I would not like to offend you.

If Sergey had already switched to the professional language of interrogation, then Nadya - to methods of working with kids, when you need to explain their shortcomings to them and at the same time not offend.

"I'll be offended," Kumanin said dully, "if the only reason for your refusal is

the need to constantly take care of the rising generation of future builders of communism...

"I will never marry a KGB officer," Nadia said somehow simply, without a hint of anger or even irritation. "I would be embarrassed to tell anyone where my husband works. Serezha, you have always been a smart, talented guy. Remember how you played the guitar at school parties? Do you like what you do?"

It was strictly forbidden to discuss such issues with anyone in the KGB. It was also required to immediately report on those who dared to ask such questions or tried to impose them.

Kumanin, by the way, was not at all sure that Nadezhda was not working for some opera that oversees boarding schools in this area of the capital, and tomorrow their whole conversation (with spicy comments) would not fall on the table of his boss.

Stunned, he was silent, not knowing what to say.

Do you remember the incident in our boarding school? Nadya continued, "that incident, thanks to which we met again. The prosecutor's office then accurately established that some scoundrels bought the children for huge money in order to try them as donors for organ transplants. The prosecutor's office was already on the trail of these people when you intervened and dropped the case. You have turned all of us into some kind of white mice, on which you can conduct any experiments, do with them as you please, because they, that is, we, will not be able to stand up for themselves and they have nowhere to complain. Then I almost lost my mind, I wanted to kill myself. And you? None of them even raised an eyebrow. Walk important and puffed up, like..." She turned sharply to him, and Sergei saw tears rolling down her cheeks.

"Sergei," she breathed right into his face, "go away, you don't need any heroism for this, just write a statement and leave." You can work as a teacher, and anyone. You have such an education. Why do you need all this? Go away and we'll be together...

Kumanin was silent. The words came up on their own, but they were not at all the ones that Nadia was waiting for and which he himself wanted to say:

How can you say such things? The children of those were found to have a dangerous infectious disease, and they were transferred to a clinic where there is special equipment for treatment. Who told you this nonsense about donors? This is all wild anti-Soviet gossip. Do you know where they are made? Do not you know? And I know. Who in the prosecutor's office told you that? - Kumanin understood that it was not he who was speaking, but his instinct for self-preservation, but his words, like a cold soul, calmed Nadya. She smiled and said: "Seryozha, call me to your place with a summons, and we will discuss all these issues with you, and now I'm sorry, I have to go."

And got out of the car.

Kumanin was sure that all the words he heard were camouflage behind which Nadia wanted to hide the presence of a more successful opponent. He had never heard anything like this from her and thought that she was singing from someone's "dissident" voice. All the girls were openly thrilled, and the men were no less openly jealous when they found out that he was a KGB officer. Therefore, he considered everything that happened to be some manifestation of female hysteria and a desire to hide the true reason for the refusal. Kumanin knew how to meet blows, but on the next day, March 8, he still could not stand it and called Nadia. They had a very nice talk, Sergei 'cast the bait: "Maybe it makes sense to meet?". And got the answer: "Why? Seryozha, we have already said everything to each other ... ". Then he somehow congratulated her on the New Year. Soon he received the rank of captain, and then ahead of schedule major. The service captured him entirely, and thoughts about Nadezhda faded into the background. That's why the call from her was for Kumanin

a complete surprise, and he could no longer understand whether it was pleasant or not?

It seemed like they broke up just yesterday. We kissed. Nadezhda, as she knew that Kumanin had nothing, brought with her a bunch of all sorts of food. They brewed coffee.

- What's happened? Sergei asked, stirring the sugar with a spoon.

Nadezhda played with her spoon, wrinkling her forehead, as if gathering her thoughts.

"Seryozha," she said, "I need you.

— As whom? he asked.

"As a man," she said without a smile, "the only man I can count on. That's how my life has been. And given your status, I think that it is you who can really help me.

- Are you in any trouble? Sergei asked.

"I don't," Nadya smiled. What trouble could I get into? They won't kick me out of work, because they won't find anyone to take my place anyway. Now orphans are practically of no interest to anyone. And their number is growing, as if the country is waging some kind of big war.

- So what's the deal? Kumanin asked again. - What help do you need?

"You see," Nadia began uncertainly, "in our boarding school, some detective stories began to happen again. However, we always have something going on: either food is stolen, or medicines, or humanitarian aid intended for children, and all this with the full connivance of the director, RONO, the local committee. It's impossible to fight, and I don't even try anymore. The point is different. They pushed me here on vacation - I didn't go out for two years. They gave me a ticket from the local committee to Truskavets and all that. And when she returned two weeks ago, she discovered that another child was missing. I asked the headmistress, Alevtina Shevchuk is now ruling us, she used to be an instructor in the Krasnopresnensky district committee. She told me that the boy had been transferred to another boarding school in Vologda. I know this boarding school. It is for mentally retarded children who have an official diagnosis of Down's disease. Do you know what it is? Kumanin nodded.

- And the missing boy is not Dawn, on the contrary, he can even be considered a child prodigy. He is six years old and speaks almost fluent French and German. Can you imagine it? In our time. I was simply fascinated by them. Both them and him, how should I say it, a secret or something?

"Indeed," agreed Kumanin, "where did such a miracle come from?" Who are his parents?

- It was sent from the Rostov distributor. I don't mean Rostov-on-Don, but Rostov the Great. The police picked him up at a bus stop on the Moscow-Yaroslavl highway. He had no papers, nothing at all. He was dressed cleanly and decently. At first they thought that he was simply lost, lagged behind the bus or from some excursion that they were coming to Rostov. He gave his name himself, but did not answer any further questions. Nothing was found out about his parents. I got the impression that he did not understand the meaning of the word at all. Meanwhile, everything speaks for the fact that he received not just a wonderful, but an unprecedented upbringing. He speaks foreign languages, yes! Our teacher, grandmother Laura, assures us that such a pronunciation cannot be obtained outside the natural language environment. In short, you have to live abroad to speak like that. But he

speaks excellent Russian. In addition, he already reads that for children of his age in our time is quite rare. Very well-read for his age.

"Interesting movie," Kumanin muttered, "and what's next?"

"I studied with him a lot," Nadya continued, "rather out of curiosity. I was intrigued by his secret. First of all, I tried to find out something about his parents, where he lived, with whom he lived and what he did before he appeared at the bus stop. And I couldn't find anything. Children at this age do not know how to hide. So he had some strange memory loss. And at the same time, he has a great head. He reads by heart the poems of Pushkin, Heine. In German! You imagine! And now I'm returning from vacation, but the boy is gone.

— Did you call Vologda? Kumanin asked.

"Of course," Nadya answered, "they said that the documents for the boy had arrived, but he himself was not there. According to their information, he fell ill with pneumonia on the way and was hospitalized in Pereslavl-Zalessky. I went there. I waited two hours for a bus in Zagorsk, searched all the hospitals in the city - there are only three of them, no one there had heard anything about this boy. I turned again to the director, and she told me: "Nadezhda Nikolaevna, take care of your direct duty. Our boarding school is overcrowded, and we are obliged to unload it, especially from children with oddities. The child, as you well know, suffered from acute memory loss, not even remembering his own parents. He requires special medical supervision, and we sent him to a special boarding school in Vologda. After all, it was found on the territory of the Yaroslavl, and not the Moscow region. We have a position to deal only with the children of Moscow, in extreme cases, regional ones. I realized that I couldn't achieve anything. And then I remembered you...

"Seryozha," Nadya asked, "your department is all-powerful. Find me this boy. Well, at least talk to our Alevtina. She'll get scared and maybe she'll tell you the truth.

"Interesting," Kumanin said gloomily. - How do you imagine it? Why should I interrogate her?

"Do you want," Nadia suggested, "I will write you a statement?"

- Write to the district police officer, - Sergey got angry. "We are strictly forbidden any kind of amateur activity. In addition, she is a former district committee instructor, so she was frightened of me. She will immediately call my management, and what will I say? That he fulfilled the request, like Don Quixote, of his lady of the heart?

"Fu, what a coward you are," Nadezhda was upset. "The higher you go, the more you are afraid of everything. Well, don't go to Alevtina. Find out where the boy is. Information flows to you. What are you worth?

"Okay, I'll try," Sergey said with obvious reluctance in his voice. - What is the boy's name?

"Alyosha Lisitsyn," Nadya answered, "that's what he called himself in the dispenser.

Kumanin shuddered.

— How did you say?

Nadia looked at him in surprise.

- Lisitsyn, Alyosha Lisitsyn. According to medical indicators, about five and a half years. Light brown hair, eyes like cornflowers, blue-blue. What happened to you? You already have something about him

heard?

Kumanin passed his hand over his face.

- No no. Didn't hear anything. Just one association... Do you have his photo? On an account card?

- The registration card was sent to Vologda, - Nadya answered, - but I have a photograph of him, both with the whole group and separately. I loved him very much and I myself starred with him. For color. We sometimes invite a photographer to capture our pets.

Is she at your home or at work? Kumanin said.

- Who? Photo? Nadia asked. - At home and at work.

"Good," Kumanin said. - Tomorrow afternoon I will drive up to your boarding school, we will try to figure it out. You apparently swore to do everything to get me kicked out of the KGB.

"On the contrary," Nadia exclaimed. - I am very glad that among my acquaintances there was a KGB officer. Otherwise, what would I do?

She suddenly looked at her watch and hurried home. Kumanin had the temptation to invite her to stay, but he overcame himself. It would look like an advance payment for a job he hasn't started yet. He drove Nadia to the subway and returned home. Involuntarily, the words of General Klimov, spoken by him to someone on the phone, before expelling Kumanin from the office, surfaced: "Where can I get you a pediatrician?" This means that Klimov, at some point known only to him, is holding a certain child for some reason. Who else needs a pediatrician? Moreover, it is difficult to find this pediatrician at this "point", although, perhaps, the "point" where he is kept is secret, but why should a child, and even a patient, be kept at such a "point"?

Why, as soon as Nadya gave the boy's last name, did he immediately remember this strange telephone conversation in General Klimov's office? Is there really a connection between these events? And why does Klimov need this child? Some nonsense! He probably just made a living.

Nevertheless, Kumanin went to bed already with a firm determination to sort out this matter. Maybe just to see the sparkle in Nadya's eyes again, like during their last conversation in the car? But then it burned him: "Alyosha Lisitsyn? Senior detective Alexander Lisitsyn was shot in February 1941. What an idiot! Are there few Lisitsyns in Russia?" All of a sudden, the whole story excited him.

Without answering any of the questions asked, Kumanin fell sound asleep.

Chapter 3

I

"Owls. Secret

December 20, 1932

comrade Lisitsyn

Comrade Lisitsyn, I am sending you a copy of the interrogation of the arrested woman in the city of Tobolsk

citizen Mezhans Paulina Kasperovna, held by the Ural comrades from the 8th branch of the OPTU.
Send your thoughts on the merits of the testimony, familiarizing them
your sources.

Congratulations on the holiday of the Cheka-OGPU. Your application will soon be decided positively.

Deputy Chairman of the OPTU G. Yagoda.

Application:

From the protocol of the interrogation of citizen Mezhans Paulina Kasperovna. October 31, 1933.

"At that moment, when the royal family was in Tobolsk and there were guards headed by Colonel Evgeny Stepanovich Kobylinsky, I know that the royal family had a lot of valuables that were not left in Leningrad (as it is written in the document), but taken to Tobolsk. As soon as the guards changed, Colonel Kobylinsky greatly contributed to the royal family in all its affairs, in particular, he let the nuns of the monastery pass to them. I well remember Uzhintseva Marfa, who brought milk, eggs and other products and had a relationship with the maid of honor Gendrikova. The Abbess of the Ivanovo Monastery once visited the royal family, and the priest of the Tobolsk Annunciation Church Alexei Vasiliev, I don't know his patronymic, who celebrated church rites and led the service, was constantly in. He was very loved by the entire royal family, was their confessor. The latter promised them that soon there would be a coup and there would be a monarchy again. He said that together with his sons he would arrange all this. In addition, Alexander Petrovich Kirpichnikov enjoyed great confidence. I remember at the end of 1917. - early 1918 the royal family began to worry about their values. It was instructed by Tsarina Alexandra Feodorovna and Tsar Nikolai Alexandrovich to take out and hide the tiaras (that is, the crowns of the royal family, both Alexandra Feodorovna and her daughters) and a number of other diamond items and jewelry. I saw the crown of Alexandra Feodorovna well, it was diamond. Some of these valuables were taken out of the arrest room through Kirpichnikov A. by the last and entrance priest Vasiliev. The other part of the gold and diamonds was entrusted to Colonel Kobylinsky, who carried them out of the arrest room. "Alexander Petrovich Kirpichnikov was very well aware of all this, and he knows where these valuables are and are stored now. In my presence, Kirpichnikov Alexander Petrovich carried out with some linen a sword in a gold frame, the handle of which was made of pure gold, and the daughters of the tsar put pearls around his neck, which he also took out of the arrest, but where he put it, I don't know. At that time, the lady-in-waiting Gendrikova told me that they should send the abbess to the monastery for safekeeping. Subsequently, I learned that the royal sword was the last to hide in Tobolsk. At first, it was stored somewhere in the ground, and then it was hidden under the porch of the Church of the Annunciation, which the priest Vasilyev personally told me about when the Whites were in Tobolsk. The lady-in-waiting Gendrikova told me that a box was handed over to Colonel Kobylinsky, in which the royal diamonds were kept.

Interrogated by: Akulov M.V.

"Try to find out additional details about the persons mentioned in the protocol. Especially: Kirpichnikov and Uzhintseva Martha.

"Owls. Secret.

January 12, 1933

Deputy Chairman of the OPTU

comrade G. G. Yagoda

At your request dated December 20, 1932, it was possible to establish the following Kirpichnikov A.P. - a former personal scribe at the court of Nikolai Romanov. During the period when the royal family was in exile in the city of Tobolsk, he acted as a special confidant of Nicholas II. The directly handed over sealed package with five wax seals from Nicholas II was handed over for storage to the former bishop Hermogenes, he took out the golden sword of the heir Alexei and handed it over to the former confessor of the royal family in Tobolsk Alexei Vasiliev. The daughter of Nikolai Romanov, Olga Nikolaevna, wore a very large pearl necklace around her neck. After handing over the package from Nikolai Romanov to Hermogenes, Kirpichnikov brought Romanov a response from Hermogenes, where he urged Nikolai not to surrender to the Bolsheviks and to hold on tight, not to sign any obligations, so as not to "enslave Russia by the Bolsheviks."

In addition, at the end of February or at the beginning of March 1918, the maid of honor of the court, Baroness Buxgevdén, and Nikolaev's room girl (whose names the source cannot remember) arrived in Tobolsk. They were not allowed into the house where the Romanovs were kept and lived in private apartments until the departure of the royal family to Yekaterinburg. These women, through A. N. Volkov, had a connection with Alexandra Fedorovna and Bishop Hermogenes. Values were also transmitted through them, which, probably, are stored by them.

As for Uzhintseva Marfa, the source cannot remember almost anything about her, except that she had a patronymic, it seems, "Andreevna" and she was a nun of the Tobolsk Ivanovo Monastery, serving as an intermediary between the Romanovs and the abbess of the monastery. As far as I know, Uzhintseva was arrested by the GPU back in 1924. So it won't be hard to find her.

Art. o/authorized Lisitsyn.

"Owls. Secret

February 7, 1933

Comrade Lisitsyn

Regarding your request. Comrade Yurovsky claims that he handed over the entire package of documents known to you back in the summer of 1918 against your own receipt. However, we could not find any documents or receipts. Try to remember to whom you handed over the package when you returned to Moscow.

Deputy Chairman of the OGPU G. G. Yagoda.

"Owls. secret

February 11, 1933

Deputy Chairman of the OPTU

comrade G. G. Yagoda

I left Yekaterinburg on the night of July 16-17 and, as you understand, I had no opportunity to take from Comrade. Yurovsky said package, and even more so to write receipts to him. We had an agreement that Yurovsky, who was supposed to go to Moscow after me (as far as I remember, in about a week), would arrange for the transfer of documents to me upon arrival. However, I did not see Yurovsky again after that and did not receive any documents from him. So let him remember where they are. Perhaps they remained in the Gokhran.

Senior detective A. E. Lisitsyn.

"To Comrade Lisitsyn

Senior Operative Commissioner at facility 17

The Board of the OGPU has made a positive decision on your petition regarding your son, who is enrolled in one of the special schools of the OGPU near Moscow. As for your replacement at the facility, this is out of the question for the time being. I personally reported this to Comrade Stalin, who said: "Comrade Lisitsyn is a real Bolshevik Chekist and must understand that although there are no irreplaceable people, there is no one to replace him. I understood this when I myself visited Comrade Lisitsyn's facility." I think that such a high appreciation of your work as the leader of our party and people will serve as your best congratulations on the upcoming 16th anniversary of the October Revolution.

On behalf of myself and on behalf of the OGPU Collegium, I wish you success in your work and good health.

Deputy Chairman of the OGPU

Berry G. G. " (without date).

Kumanin looked dumbfounded at the screen, not believing his eyes. He was already somehow used to the fact that all the correspondence of Lisitsyn, just a senior opera, which Kumanin himself was, was conducted only with two or three representatives of the top management of the OPTU, although according to the "table of ranks" between Lisitsyn and, say, the same Unshlikht or Yagoda should have been a whole army of officials and a palisade of authorities. But the fact that Lisitsyn was reported to Stalin himself, and it was clear that the great leader knew Lisitsyn and visited his facility, amazed Kumanin. "The Party is indebted to Comrade Lisitsyn." The party repaid the debt to Comrade Lisitsyn by putting him against the wall in February 1941.

So, we managed to find out a few important facts. The object had the number 17 and, judging by some dates on the documents, was relatively close to Moscow. On February 7, 1933, Yagoda sent a letter to Lisitsyn about some documents that either he or Yurovsky had lost. And on February 11, Lisitsyn already answered this request. The documents were stamped, indicating that they were sent through the courier mail of the owls. secret correspondence. This means that if Yagoda signed the letter on February 7, then it was sent on the 8th and received either on the same day or on the 9th, since the Lubyanka had already read it on the 11th answer.

In addition, it became clear from the correspondence that Lisitsyn left Yekaterinburg on the night of July 16-17, 1918, that is, he was present at the execution of the royal family, and then left in such a hurry that he did not even have time to draw up any documents received from Yurovsky, or, most likely, simply forgot about them in a hurry. What made him leave so urgently? What did he take away? These questions can be answered with a high probability: he took away some royal valuables. It is also quite obvious that Lisitsyn has been closely involved in the search for royal treasures almost since 1918. Apparently, object "number 17" was a branch of the Gokhran, where valuables and documents were stored, the analysis of which was carried out by Lisitsyn. And who were his mysterious "sources"? Why was he considered indispensable? From Lisitsyn's correspondence with the leadership, it is clear that the famous Artuzov, head of the secret political department of the Cheka-OGPU, also worked with someone at the facility.

So, he was also connected to the treasure hunt or did other tasks with the help of Lisitsyn? Maybe "object 17" is the famous secret laboratory where counterfeit foreign banknotes and passports were made? No, it doesn't. Is there somewhere a decoding of the pre-war secret "points" of the NKVD? Surely there is a decryption of "mailboxes" in the general file cabinet? Kumanin slowly turned the film over again.

The next frame contained another document:

"Owls. Secret

November 28, 1933

Senior Operative Commissioner of the OGPU

Comrade Lisitsyn.

We are sending you copies of the documents sent by the OGPU in the Urals, whose comrades, thanks to your excellent work, returned to the people the values so necessary for the implementation of the Stalinist plan for the industrialization of the country. You have been presented with a high government award.

Deputy Chairman of the OGPU G. G. Yagoda.

Then came the testimony from the protocol of interrogation of the discovered and arrested nun Uzhintseva Marfa Andreevna, who tried to lock herself up, but could not stand even a day at the "rack" and began to confess.

"... I confess that in my first testimony, the approximate place of the royal valuables that Chemodurov hid and showed me, I indicated incorrectly. In reality, it was like this: before the royal family was taken away from Tobolsk, the tsar's valet Terenty Ivanovich Chemodurov came to me at the monastery courtyard and, handing me a large bundle, asked me to give it to the abbess to the monastery. Chemodurov said that it contains the values of the royal family, which I myself guessed. These valuables were kept by the abbess until the spring of 1923, when the monastery was closed. When the monastery was closed, the abbess hid the monastery valuables and urged the nuns to resist their removal. Upon learning that she was in danger of being arrested for this, the abbess handed me the valuables of the royal family and asked me to keep them until "real power" was established, as she said. I took the bundle, wrapped it tightly in a towel and lowered it into the well in the monastery garden. Soon I was arrested and spent 18 days in prison. Sitting in prison, I was very worried about the valuables, I was afraid that they would deteriorate from well water. As soon as they released me, I immediately rushed to the monastery, into the garden to the well, and pulled out the valuables. Having pulled the valuables from the well, I buried them in the grave of the monastery cemetery. However, I could not calm down, all the time I was afraid that they would not be stolen. From fear, I lost sleep, and appetite, and memory. Completely exhausted, I decided to throw the valuables into the Irtysh River. Before carrying out this decision, I sought the advice of Vasily Mikhailovich Kornilov, a local fisherman who was connected with our monastery, with whom I was familiar. When I told Vasily Mikhailovich about my decision, he was terribly frightened and waved his hands at me: "What are you, what are you?! After all, real order will be established, real power, then they will ask you for a report, because they will force you to climb into the Irtysh for valuables. I was completely lost, I didn't know what to do. Then she asked Vasily Mikhailovich to take the valuables for safekeeping. At first he refused, then he agreed to temporarily keep them at his place. A few days after my conversation with Kornilov, I came to his apartment, brought with me valuables, two glass jars and two tueskas. I transferred the valuables from the bundle into these jars and tueski, went down with Vasily Mikhailovich underground, and there they buried them together. It was, I think, in 1925, I do not remember exactly. After some time, Kornilov left Tobolsk. New tenants, unfamiliar to me, settled in his apartment. At one time, policemen lived in it. All the time I was worried about the valuables, I was afraid that they would deteriorate or be stolen ... In October of this year. I was arrested by the OPTU and taken to Sverdlovsk ... Then there was a search certificate for V. M. Kornilov: "Before the revolution and after the revolution, during the NEP, Kornilov was engaged in the fishing industry and trade in the city of Tobolsk,

the last in the period 1924-25gt. On behalf of the dean of the Ivanovo Monastery, he accepted for safekeeping the royal valuables, consisting in 2 diamond diadems (crowns), a number of other large diamonds and gold crosses. Stored in the mountains. Tobolsk in his own house on the street. Decembrists under the house in the ground, in the hiding of which his family also took part. Due to the fact that in 1928-29. was dispossessed as a fisherman-merchant, from the city of Tobolsk, together with his family, he left with his wife first in the mountains. Sverdlovsk, and then to Kazan. The son is in the city of Sverdlovsk." This was followed by a summary report summing up this stage of the operation.

"Owls. Secret

Deputy Chairman of the OGPU Comrade Yagoda.

Special note. "On the seizure of royal valuables in the city of Tobolsk."

As a result of a long search on November 20 this year. in the city of Tobolsk, valuables of the royal family were confiscated. These valuables, during the stay of the royal family in the city of Tobolsk, were transferred for safekeeping by the valet of the royal family, Chemodurov, Abbess of the Tobolsk Ivanovo Monastery, Druzhinina. The latter, shortly before her death, handed them over to her assistant, Dean Martha Uzhinskaya ... October 15, p. Mrs. Uzhintseva admitted to keeping the valuables of the royal family and indicated their location. There were no valuables in the originally indicated Uzhintseva place. Then V. M. Kornilov was brought to Tobolsk. He indicated the actual place of storage of valuables. At the direction of Kornilov, the valuables were confiscated (the valuables in two glass jars inserted into wooden tubs were buried underground in Kornilov's apartment).

Among the seized items are:

- 1) 100 carat diamond brooch,
 - 2) three head studs with diamonds of 44 and 36 carats,
 - 3) a crescent with diamonds up to 70 carats (according to some reports, this crescent was presented to the king by the Turkish sultan),
- 4J diadems of royal daughters and queens, etc. According to preliminary estimates of our experts, the total amount of valuables seized was three million, two hundred and seventy thousand, six hundred and ninety-three gold rubles (3,270,693 rubles).

PP OPTU in the Urals Reshetov

Beginning ECO PP OPTU Samoilov.

This report was followed by a list of seized valuables, containing 154 items, and their preliminary assessment by experts. At the end of the list, Yagoda wrote: "T. Lisitsyn! Please check the list of valuables. Is something missing? Can this stage be considered completed? I. G. G.

"Owls. Secret December 17, 1933

Deputy PP OGPU

comrade G. G. Yagoda

We checked the list. Everything seems to fit, except for the absence of several items of precious weapons: a sword, two sabers, a dagger (nautical) and two silver dagger.

I'll answer your additional question. Most of the valuables were entrusted to the former colonel Evgeny Stepanovich Kobylinsky, who commanded the protection of the royal family in Tobolsk. Having free access to the prisoners, as well as the right to enter and exit the arrest house at any time, E. S. Kobylinskiy removed most of the valuables from the detention facilities. During the years of the civil war Kobylinsky E.S. fought on the side of the whites, and then went abroad and lived in Harbin. Its development by us began in 1921. We managed to get a special letter addressed to him so that he would return and hand over the valuables to the person indicated in the letter (our employee). The goal was to find out the place where Kobylinskiy hides valuables. Kobylinsky believed this letter and in 1927 secretly arrived in the USSR. Unfortunately, shortly after arrival, due to inconsistency in the actions of local OGPU bodies, partly due to the high secrecy of the operation, Kobylinsky was arrested ahead of time, and our employee who tried to cover him was killed. Kobylinsky did not want to answer any questions and died during the third interrogation from heart failure. Officially considered executed for counter-revolutionary activities. We tried to find his wife Kobylinskaya Claudia Mikhailovna, but in the post-war chaos we could not find her. We must again take steps to find her.

In addition, I was able to establish that some of the valuables are stored in the Old Believer skete of St. Dmitry, which is 200 miles northeast of Tobolsk, near a certain Mezhenkaya Maria Sergeevna, who has been hiding there since 1918. This hermitage can only be reached on horseback in summer. I think that things will go much faster now, since the opinion that values and currency should belong to the people, and not to private individuals, is in fact already shared by everyone.

Art. o/authorized Lisitsyn.

At that moment, an "ensign" entered the room where Kumanin worked and called Sergei to the telephone, which was on her desk in the waiting room.

Klimov was still not in the Office. Kumanin caught a glimpse of him on the TV screen, standing under an umbrella to the left of Gorbachev. It was raining in some European capital, either in Brussels or in Bonn. I didn't want to go in. It followed from this that the general would not appear in the city before the General Secretary returned to Moscow.

Kumanin went to the phone.

"Sergey," he heard the voice of his friend Captain Gorelov, "my boss invites you to his place. Go to his office now."

Gorelov's boss was Major General Alexander Steblikov, who headed the very mysterious department of New Economic Relations, whose goal was to create modern levers for managing the economy with elements of market relations. In practice, this has so far meant the arrest of anyone who takes even half a step away from the state economy without the knowledge of the KGB.

Kumanin was very surprised by the interest shown to him by Steblikov, since he had never dealt with economic problems.

"Sergei Stepanovich," said the general, gesturing for Kumanin, who had come in, to sit down, "I have a few questions for you."

"I'm listening, Comrade General," Kumanin answered readily, glancing at the old stone clock that adorned the general's office.

It was already half past one, things were moving towards dinner, after which Kumanin promised Nadya to come to the boarding school.

"Today," General Steblikov read something in his working notebook, "at 6 pm you should give a lecture to members of the public in the Red October club on the topic "The ritual murder of the royal family." Do you remember this?

"Yes, of course," Kumanin said in embarrassment—he completely forgot about it, "but, Comrade General...

"Alexander Ivanovich," Steblikov corrected him amiably.

"By order of General Klimov, Alexander Ivanovich," continued Kumanin, "I have been seconded to his disposal to carry out a task that is difficult to reconcile with reading public lectures.

"I know this," said Steblikov, "but, you must admit, it's not the case like this, unexpectedly, to interrupt a matter of national importance, Stepan Sergeyevich.

"Sergey Stepanovich," prompted Kumanin.

"Forgive me," Steblikov smiled, "there are so many names in my head that sometimes I get confused. So, I think that there is no reason to interrupt such an important and useful business.

Kumanin with all his appearance showed complete solidarity with the opinion of the general, but it was not entirely clear to him how all this was connected with the "New Economic Relations", which was handled by General Steblikov's department.

"Therefore," the general summed up, "the lecture scheduled for today cannot be canceled in any way. He interrupted Kumanin's objections with a gesture of his hand and continued:

- I do not want at all, and I do not have the right to cancel the orders of General Klimov. But since you can no longer deal with this matter, I am ready to give a lecture in your place and generally take over some of your duties in supervising groups of citizens with a monarchist orientation. Please send me your lecture notes.

"Personally, I can't help you, Alexander Ivanovich," Kumanin honestly admitted, "when General Klimov ordered me to come to his disposal, I handed over my unit to Captain Osadchy, who, by order of Colonel Kudryavtsev, should temporarily manage all affairs in this direction.

- I spoke with Kudryavtsev, - the general twisted his thin lips in a smile, - he assures that all the materials remained in your sealed safe, the keys to which he does not have.

Kumanin handed over the keys to Kudryavtsev, and since he says that he does not have the keys, it means that he does not want to give anything from his department to Steblikov and, of course, hopes that Kumanin will not let him down.

"Quite right," Kumanin confirmed, "I handed over the keys to the safe to General Klimov, who temporarily ordered the suspension of educational activities until further notice.

Kumanin was sure that Steblikov would think a hundred times before deciding to ask Klimov for the key. Moreover, there is no such place.

- At Klimov's? Steblikov darkened. - Where is he now?

Kumanin spread his hands, making it clear that he was not privy to the plans of the command.

"However," the general went on just as gloomily, "I doubt that Klimov will help my

assistance department. It seems that he, like many others, does not understand the priority of economics over politics.

Kumanin listened respectfully, glancing furtively at his watch. He did not want to discuss at all on the topic "what General Klimov understands and what does not understand." Such discussions for ordinary employees never ended well. Therefore, he decided to direct the thoughts of General Steblikov in a different direction:

- Allow me a question, Alexander Ivanovich? I also do not understand what effect my lectures can have on the economic situation of the country, which, as is known from the materials of the last plenum, is experiencing some difficulties caused by ...

- You do not understand? Steblikov was surprised. - The most direct relationship. There are, roughly speaking, two types of economy. One type - it can be called Judeo-Zionist - implies the obligatory receipt of profit at all levels of economic structures, puts wealth over spirituality and catholicity. The second - I would call it truly Slavic - goes back to the very beginnings of our Russian civilization. It provides for the priority of spirituality over material wealth, and therefore denies the primacy of profit. The people, thanks to their catholicity, give the entire end product of the economy to their beloved country, and the country, in turn, distributes the received equally among all. It seems to me that the Judeo-Zionists killed the tsar for this reason - you, Sergey Stepanovich, managed to vividly prove this - in order to replace the truly Russian economy with your own. This was dictated, among other things, by their eternal desire for gain and profit. Do you get my point?

Least of all in the world did Kumanin like arguing with the generals, and therefore he readily nodded, making it clear that he not only caught the general's thought, but also completely shared it. This idea was clearly agreed with someone, otherwise Steblikov would never have dared to express it aloud. But upstairs they were talking about something else, and the general, retelling what was entrusted to him, most likely mixed everything up, since he understood economics as well as in all other areas of human knowledge. Even from the high school course, it was clear that the economy based on the primacy of profit existed just under Nicholas II, and the "cathedral economy", based on the appropriation by the state of the entire final product and its further distribution at their own discretion, was invented by the Judeo-Masons who killed the king .

The general was delighted with the support from Kumanin and asked to clarify what he means when he speaks of the ritual murder of the king, what is the essence of the ritual and where can one read about it?

Kumanin replied that a detailed analysis of the rituals is available only in books in German published in the years preceding the Nazis coming to power and in the first years of their stay in power, except, of course, for medieval literature, with which he, unfortunately, do not know. The procedure in Yekaterinburg was supposed to go like this: (Kumanin specifically said "should have gone through", and not "passed", in order to insure himself in case Steblikov was recording their conversation on tape in order "to ask him later for misinformation):

- Yurovsky and his team were supposed to hang the king by the legs from the ceiling and perform an ancient dance around him with clapping and jumping in the obligatory presence of a rabbi. At this time, the rest had to knead the sacred matzo.

— Rabbi? Steblikov asked, listening to Kumanin with apparent pleasure, even opening his mouth slightly, "was there a rabbi there?"

"Absolutely," Kumanin confirmed, "and not a local one, but one specially arrived from Moscow with a ritual knife of the supreme butcher sent from Warsaw.

The general quickly took notes of Kumanin's words, nodding his head.

"It was with this knife," Kumanin continued, holding back his smile with all his might, "that the rabbi cut the king's throat, and the august blood was poured into a special vessel called "khalesh", after which it was poured into goblets and drunk by all those present, and partially drained into dough for matzah, which was eaten. The body was then thrown into a barrel of sulfuric acid and dissolved, which is also part of the ritual. That's pretty much all that probably happened.

— Is the name of the rabbi known? Steblikov asked.

"He hid under a pseudonym," Kumanin said, "and left the same night. In the materials, he appears as a "black rabbi."

- And all this was done contrary to the orders of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin and the All-Russian Central Executive Committee? the general continued.

"Of course," Kumanin confirmed, looking anxiously at his watch.

- And how many such developments do you have? Steblikov asked, closing his notebook.

- According to the instructions of the leadership and the secretariat of the Central Committee, we conducted such developments exclusively for the compromising evidence of our monarcho-nationalist movement in the eyes of the public both within the USSR and abroad. I have prepared notes for five or six lectures on this topic, but I want to honestly warn you, Comrade General, there is no historical evidence for all this.

- And who needs them, this evidence? - Steblikov grinned, - it is necessary to make your achievements widely publicized. Could you ask General Klimov to hand over these materials to me?

"It seems to me," Kumanin said, "that it would be much easier for you to do it yourself. Issues at the level of generals are always resolved much easier than through the mediation of majors ...

"I like your modesty," Steblikov smiled, "among young officers it is now a rarity. All the majors imagine themselves to be at least marshals. But here is another question. After all, you are the author of these materials, who, in addition, cannot be denied talent and a creative approach to fulfilling the assigned order. Now the Party has instructed me to oversee the Russian national movement, in particular, issues of monarchism. I think that the units involved in the fight against all manifestations of Zionism will also be reassigned to me. When you solve the problems associated with secondment at the disposal of General Klimov, I will ask you to think about moving to me for the post of colonel. The question of transforming my department into a department is now being considered, in which I would like to see you as head of the leading department. What do you say to that?

"I am flattered by such a high appreciation of my work," Kumanin replied, who had not expected such a turn of events at all.

"Now the future of our country, the party depends on such young patriots as you, Major," Steblikov said somewhat pompously. Many Russian thanks to you for your work.

Is it necessary to answer such words, as it should be: "I serve the Soviet Union!", Kumanin could not figure out, but just in case, he got up and took some semblance of a stand "to attention",

which also pleased the general.

"If there is time," Steblikov smiled, giving him his hand, "come today and listen to my lecture, which I read for you."

The general shook his finger at Sergei and smiled again with his thin lips.

II

It was already about three o'clock in the afternoon when Kumanin drove up to the boarding school. Before doing anything, he wanted to talk to Nadia one more time. Right on the watch, the duty officer announced that Nadezhda Nikolaevna was not there.

- Already gone? Kumanin was upset.

"And she didn't come," the attendant said, "maybe when I was having lunch ..." and she began to spin the dial of the local telephone:

— Lyuba? Is Nadya Shestakova in place? To her friend from ...

"RONO," Kumanin prompted.

- She is not there, - the duty officer hung up, - she has not been since morning. Maybe she got sick, maybe she went to the district security service for the kids to beat out everything. We have no hot water for the second day. Preschool! Can you imagine?

"I can imagine," Kumanin agreed. - Can I call you?

Kumanin dialed Nadine's number. For a long time no one approached, then the familiar voice of her mother was heard.

"Hello, Lidia Fyodorovna, this is Seryozha Kumanin," he introduced himself. - Can I call Nadia?

"Hello, Seryozha," Lidia Fyodorovna answered. Nadia is at work. It will be late. Anything to convey?

- How long has she been gone? Kumanin asked.

- As usual, in the morning. Seryozha, I'm sorry, everything is on fire in my kitchen. I'll tell you that you called," and she hung up.

Finding out that the headmistress was there, Kumanin went up to the third floor, inhaling with disgust the smell of burnt porridge and bleach.

In the principal's waiting room, a fair-haired girl was tapping on a typewriter.

- Me to the director - said Kumanin.

"Alevtina Ivanovna has a meeting," the girl announced, looking up from the typewriter, but she stopped short at the sight of the Kumanin certificate and rushed through the director's door: "Alevtina Ivanovna, a comrade from the authorities is here!"

Alevtina Ivanovna, a tall plump lady of about forty-five, was sitting at her table eating a cake and drinking tea from a large cup with a red berry painted on it in an ornament of green leaves. The second cake lay on a saucer. For a moment, the headmistress froze with the cake in her hand, then put it back on the saucer, covered it with a napkin, put it together with the cup somewhere under the table with the telephones, wiped

lips with a handkerchief and asked: "Where are you from?" From the police?

Kumanin, like any operative, had a whole collection of various certificates with him, including a police one, but he decided not to cheat, but immediately go with the main trump card:

"I am from the Committee," and handed the headmistress the certificate.

Alevtina Fyodorovna's face became blotchy:

- Shestakova has already reached the committee. Interesting. Because of these eternal squabbles, Comrade Major, there is no time to work, no time to take care of the children. All day I have to write explanations in different instances.

"I sympathize," Kumanin said, "but you must admit that when children disappear in broad daylight, this is not normal.

What does "in broad daylight" mean? the headmistress exploded. The child was not quite normal. We have a medical certificate. There are special boarding schools for this category of preschool children, which, like ours, are overcrowded. We took the boy on a temporary basis, and as soon as a place in Vologda became vacant, we sent him there. And what was there before me, under the former director, I do not know.

"But for some reason the child didn't make it to Vologda," Kumanin interrupted her. - Don't know why?

"And I don't want to know," said Alevtina Ivanovna angrily. - I sent, Vologda accepted. I myself have a lot of things to do.

She paused and then asked:

— What else did Shestakova say to you?

"It seems to me," Kumanin prompted, "that it would be better to call Shestakova here, listen to her, and sort everything out at last.

Kumanin said this in the hope of finding out from the headmistress where Nadya was, but he was mistaken.

The headmistress went to the door of her office, opened it a crack and called out into the waiting room:

- Lena, call Nadezhda Nikolaevna Shestakova to me. Urgently.

The blond head very quickly poked through the door and reported:

- Alevtina Ivanovna, Nadezhda Nikolaevna is not at the department.

- Where is she? the headmistress asked. - Where did you go?

"They say she hasn't been since morning," the secretary said, "she didn't come at all. There are only nannies and nurses.

"He's probably running around with his complaints," said Alevtina Ivanovna angrily. - I'll expel her under the article for absenteeism. Is it possible to leave children for the whole day without a pediatrician?

Is she a pediatrician? Kumanin asked. I thought she was a teacher.

"Pediatrician," the headmistress confirmed reluctantly. - I graduated from medical school a year ago on the job. But still, I'll kick her out if she continues to squabble. AND

The local committee will support me.

"Excuse me," Kumanin said. "I did not come here at all to interfere in your labor conflicts with your subordinates. I want to deal with the disappearance of the child and put an end to it, without bringing it back to the prosecutor's office and the official investigation. It is possible that Nadezhda Nikolaevna is really an overly impressionable person, and therefore, maybe you can answer a few questions for me.

"I'm listening to you," Alevtina Ivanovna reacted dryly and added:

"Just hurry, please, I have a teacher's meeting at four o'clock."

"Good," Kumanin nodded his head, glancing at his watch. - This boy, Alyosha Lisitsyn, if I am not mistaken, was officially recognized - mental and other deviations. I think that this is done by the medical board, which, by its own decision, draws up a special document?

"Of course," the headmistress confirmed, "an act is drawn up in form II and, accordingly, the child is actuated as it should be.

— May I have a look at this act? Kumanin asked.

"For God's sake," the headmistress got up, went over to a simple filing cabinet that stood in the wall between the windows, pulled out a folder with the inscription "Acts" and handed Kumanin two sheets of paper connected with a paper clip, which held a small, about four by four centimeters, photograph.

"What can I say," said Alevtina Ivanovna, handing the acts to Kumanin. - The boy is almost six years old, and he does not remember either mom or dad, or where he lived before the police found him on the Yaroslavl highway. Can you consider such a child normal?

Kumanin shrugged his shoulders, looking through the documents. Beneath them was the signature of Alevtina Ivanovna herself, whose last name was Petukhova, a boarding doctor and some kind of educator.

Are these the signatures of your employees? asked Kumanin, looking at the photograph of Alyosha Lisitsyn. "Where could he have seen this boy before? A very familiar face."

Do you want to interview them? the headmistress asked.

- Whom? Kumanin did not understand.

"Those who signed the act," the headmistress prompted.

"No need," Kumanin replied, "but I still have questions for you.

"Please," Alevtina Ivanovna sighed, pursing her lips.

There was not a trace of anxiety in her eyes, but rather the bewilderment of an adult who is forced to play some incomprehensible game.

- How, - Kumanin asked, - did you send the child to Vologda? Car, train, plane? Which of your employees accompanied him or, rather, accompanies him, since the child did not arrive in Vologda? And, finally, after all, someone had to, having accepted a child from you, leave a receipt or other document with you? If you answer all these questions, then I believe that no one personally will have any claims against you and your institution.

There was silence.

Alevtina Ivanovna looked at Kumanin with incomprehensible interest, a strange half smile, half grimace played on her lips.

- Are you seriously? she asked in a strange way.

Do you think I came here to joke? Kumanin began to get angry.

Are they trying to set me up now? The headmistress's voice began to lose confidence.

- Who are they? Kumanin did not understand. - What are you talking about?

"Don't pretend you don't know anything," continued Alevtina Ivanovna. Are you testing me?

"Listen," Kumanin sighed. - If you talk to me in hints, then you will have to drive in my car to the Lubyanka and write an official explanation for everything that happened there. And if it does not satisfy me, then I will issue you a detention of seventy-two hours to begin with, so that you have time to edit this explanation. Do you even know who you are talking to? Do you understand the gravity of the situation?

— What are you? At all? the headmistress turned pale. - Understand yourself first! she continued with a shrill note in her voice, "Are you making a fool out of me, or what?" Or you think you have no control. Some take the boy, and another comes looking for him. What numbers! Look for a child in your bosom! He will issue me a detention for seventy-two hours! You arrange what you need.

"Please," Kumanin grimaced, "no need for tantrums. And there is no need to take me to the cry. Calm down. Who took Alyosha Lisitsyn away? Explain thoroughly.

"They took yours away, as if you don't know?" the headmistress tried to speak more calmly, although shrill notes still broke through her.

- Ours? What are ours? Kumanin asked.

- Yours. From the committee," Alevtina Ivanovna blurted out angrily. - The three of us arrived with a policeman. The child, it turns out, is on the All-Union wanted list. His parents did something that is scary to say. So they took the child.

Did they show you any documents? Kumanin asked.

"Well, how about it," some confidence began to appear in the headmistress's voice again. - Everyone has the same books as you. And the attitude was from the city prosecutor's office. They said that in connection with the secrecy of the child, it was necessary to arrange a transfer to some other boarding school, and took a non-disclosure subscription. Why are they sending you now to find out something? Check if I have learned everything or not?

- Do you know their last names? Kumanin asked.

"No, no," the headmistress replied quickly. - I don't remember any names. Worried, did not read the documents.

- So, it turns out that someone took the child and make ends meet. No note, no receipt? Kumanin continued to turn Alyosha's photo in his hands.

"They didn't leave anything," Alevtina Ivanovna confirmed. - Yes, I got confused: is it a conceivable thing, a whole brigade of security officers came for a young child, as if he were some kind of Tseraushnik. And yes, I signed a non-disclosure agreement....

"Good," said Kumanin, still trying to figure out why Alyosha Lisitsyn's face seemed so familiar to him. - Take a piece of paper. Write: "To the senior KGB detective, Major Kumanin S.S. From citizen Petukhova Alevtina Ivanovna, director of boarding school No. 4, living at the address ..." Have you written? Next: Explanation. From a new line: "I, Petukhova A.I., handed over the underage Lisitsyn Alexei to representatives of the KGB at their request on such and such a date." When it was. Remember? Put this number in. Subscribe and put today's date. This is for your benefit. So that no one else makes claims against you. Write down my phone number, and if there is any continuation in this case, please call. I will take a photo of the boy with me.

He opened the briefcase and put in it a sheet with an explanation from the headmistress and a photograph of Alyosha Lisitsyn.

- You turn things around like that, - said Alevtina Ivanovna, drooping, - like I shouldn't have given them a child? So what?

"I didn't say that," Kumanin objected. - You, like every Soviet person, are obliged to obey the requirements of the authorities. But the specifics of your case is such that you were obliged to record this event somehow. Say, the same Shestakova will bring people from the prosecutor's office to you. What do you tell them? Your legend about Vologda will not live even an hour. Where is the evidence that you did not sell the child to some childless Azerbaijani family for five to ten thousand? Have you thought about the consequences for yourself?

The headmistress was silent, looking fearfully at Kumanin.

- Violation of the non-disclosure agreement, - continued Kumanin, - is a very serious crime, providing for imprisonment for up to five years. In a conversation with me, you had the right to do so, but in a conversation with employees of the prosecutor's office, police or other law enforcement or supervisory authority, you will not have such a right. Thus, all responsibility will be assigned to you. Do you understand me?

"But, comrade major," objected Alevtina Ivanovna, "you will confirm in case what..."

"I'm not sure," Kumanin interrupted her. "Your explanation gives me grounds for verifying this case. If the boy was really taken by our employees, I can cover for you. If you invented this story to confuse me, then you will answer to the fullest extent of the existing law ...

"I swear to you," the headmistress's voice trembled, it was clear that she was ready to sob from self-pity.

"Calm yourself," said Kumanin, "and find out if Shestakova has come."

Shestakova did not come.

It was already about five o'clock in the evening, and Kumanin decided to return to the office to find out if General Klimov had appeared, then to have lunch and, if possible (if the Klimov "ensign" was in place after five), to watch the microfilms. But the strange incident with Alyosha Lisitsyn never left his mind. There are a huge number of small children in the country's shelters, whose parents are convicted and sit in countless zones and prisons. But he

I have never personally heard that preschool children were subjected to any measures by the authorities, at least in post-Stalin times. On the contrary, everyone - both the KGB and the police - immediately sent the child, whose parents were in the zone or were wanted, to some kind of children's institution.

Child trafficking criminals would hardly have come to the headmistress waving committee certificates. In addition, they did not need any child, but a specific one: Alyosha Lisitsyn. If it really was the guys from the KGB, then he, Kumanin, got into a rather unpleasant story, because, without having the authority, he interfered in someone else's operation. And he had neither the authority nor the grounds for intervention, since Nadezhda's request could not be considered such a basis. To be honest, he did not respond to Nadia's request, but to the boy's name and to a strange telephone conversation in Klimov's office. Intuitively, he felt that the disappearance of the boy and this conversation were somehow connected, and now he was convinced that he was right. The child was taken from the boarding school on the orders of Klimov, this can be considered proven. And if so, then he is ready to assert that between the mysterious detective Lisitsyn, who was shot in 1941, and Alyosha Lisitsyn, who was taken away by KGB officers from boarding school No. 4 in 1989, there is some kind of connection, perhaps not only related, but and consequent-causal.

So, he owns a document signed by citizen Petukhova A.I., confirming that this is not a fantasy. Judging by how easily he managed to intimidate the headmistress of the boarding school and force her to write an explanation, she has no access to Klimov and will not be able to complain to him about Kumanin's arbitrariness, although one cannot be completely sure of this. We need to talk to Nadezhda again and try to clarify some details of this case. Perhaps Nadia also did not tell him everything that she knew. In addition, in order to protect yourself, it will be necessary, as soon as Klimov returns, to report to him about everything under one sauce or another, as if by the way, they say, curious coincidences happen in life.

Returning to the Lubyanka, Kumanin went to the administration archive.

The end of the working day was approaching. If the working day was considered irregular for operational workers, then many services, including archives, secret libraries, tape recorders, and the like, as a rule, were already closed at six o'clock in the evening until morning.

Retired Colonel Maximov, who worked in the operational archive, began his service in the NKVD under Heinrich Yagoda. Now he was close to eighty, but he seemed cheerful, retaining in his appearance the severity of past times. He also had small weaknesses, which the entire management knew about, in particular, he was very fond of young employees addressing him in all forms.

"I wish you good health, Comrade Colonel," Kumanin announced, entering the archive, smiling and giving his figure some semblance of a stand at attention. - Allow me to apply. Major Kumanin.

- Don't yell. At ease," Maximov muttered peacefully. - What do you want, Seryoga? Hurry up, I need to go to the medical unit for procedures.

"Vasily Nikitich," Kumanin asked, "I need a decoding of one pre-war point. It flickers in some of my documents as "object 17". What was this object and where was it located?

"Now we'll see," Maximov grumbled, and going up to a massive fireproof cabinet, he opened it and pulled out a thick stationery book hung with old wax seals. The old man opened the ledger and began to run his finger along the lines, moving his lips. In the old days, Maksimov served as deputy head of the detention center - the famous

of the inner prison in Lubyanka, and, probably, he could tell a lot of interesting things. It was rumored that he personally carried out sentences against famous personalities, from Yagoda to Meyerhold. His chief, Major General Opanasenko, in Khrushchev's time, got fifteen years in prison, where he died. But Maksimov got out and even after his resignation he was removed "out of harm's way", otherwise he would sit down to write memoirs, was left in the department for technical work. He could tell a lot, but he did not tell anything, like other NKVD veterans: they were more afraid of words, especially their own, than bullets. There were many examples in their memory of how an accidentally escaped word instantly turned into a bullet, which, like a boomerang, circled over your head and hit you in the same

back of the head.

"But it is possible," Kumanin thought, "that it was Uncle Vasya who shot Lisitsyn in 1941, or was present at the same time. Ask him or not? Decided not to ask.

"There is no 17th object," Maximov announced meanwhile, closing the book and putting it back into place in a fireproof cabinet. - After the 15th, the 21st immediately follows. And the 17th is not.

- What does this mean? asked the perplexed Kumanin. The old man looked gloomily at Kumanin:

- This means that the facility was either quickly curtailed for some reason, or it is still operating. And operating objects in other register. Not me. By numbering, this is a very old object. Not later than the second half of the 18th year. Most likely, he was either in Moscow itself or in the region.

"And you haven't heard anything about him?" Kumanin dared to ask.

- What I heard, I have already forgotten everything, - Maximov grinned, - and I advise you, Seryoga: remember less of what does not concern you, and be less interested. Our main rule: learned - forgot. And if you didn't know anything, it's even better. They said they did it and that's it. Well, go, I need to rent a room and seal it.

General Klimov's office was closed. Kumanin went down to the dining room. "The best thing is not to show official zeal, but to go home and try to meet Nadia again," he decided.

III

After drinking coffee in the kitchen, Sergei called Nadia again. Her mother came up and said that Nadia was still not at home and that she was already worried, because they called from the boarding school, they were also looking for Nadia, who, it turns out, did not come to work today.

"But she wasn't going anywhere?" Kumanin asked. "Maybe she went somewhere and stayed.

"No, Seryozha," said Nadina's mother. "She didn't tell me anything. She left as usual. They should have a teachers' council today. She said she would be late at work. But you know that she never comes from the shelter before ten in the evening, and often spends the night there.

Kumanin promised to call later and hung up. It was already about eight in the evening. He called the boarding school and asked the duty officer if the teacher Shestakova was there. An elderly female voice replied that Shestakova was not there at all today: "Call me tomorrow."

To get a little distraction, Kumanin turned on the TV. The screen showed the empty shelves of a Moscow grocery store, the angry faces of saleswomen and a huge

a crowd of people crowding at closed doors in the hope that something will be brought up. The voice of the announcer behind the scenes was broadcasting: "The queue for everything, from sausage to razor blades, has long been an integral part of the life of Soviet people. It is humiliating for the citizens of a country building nuclear power plants and space shuttles to line up behind a bar of soap. But people are standing..." A well-fed-looking comrade appeared on the screen, a typical secretary of the district committee, but, judging by the inscription that appeared on the screen, it was GUM director Stanislav Sorokin. Smiling, he spoke into an outstretched microphone: "Now, in accordance with the old joke, goods with the letter "B" are in short supply - EVERYTHING. I am convinced that the way out is in imports ..." He was replaced by an elderly police officer in the uniform of a lieutenant colonel. "The queue is a field of activity both for speculators and for the abuse of trade workers. Suffice it to say, recently, in the course of a special operation that lasted two weeks, the police found sixteen million rubles worth of goods hidden under the counter in Moscow shops. And for the year - fifteen thousand criminally punishable cases of hiding goods. Here is the o

Kumanin changed the channel. On the screen appeared old wooden buildings, log locks, people waving picks, a pillar with a large home-made poster: "Long live the leadership of the OPTU!". Then Stalin and Yagoda appeared on the screen, discussing something animatedly. "The phenomenon of the Stalin channel," said the announcer, "is still filled with secrets. Why did Stalin need to kill three hundred and eighty thousand people at this construction site, whose energy would be so useful in the near future in repelling the treacherous attack of the Nazis on the Soviet Union ..." Kumanin turned off the TV.

After Gorbachev, for unknown reasons, announced a course towards perestroika and glasnost, the country clearly went downhill. The Chernobyl accident, the terrible earthquake in Armenia, hundreds of other large and small disasters on land, at sea and in the air turned the entire vast territory of the nuclear superpower into one disaster zone. All this was accompanied by the complete disappearance of goods from the store, the introduction of a rationing system for food and basic industrial goods, an increase in crime and a decline in morality. "There are all the symptoms of the coming end of the world "in a single country," Kumanin recalled the cynical words of one of the interrogated.

Even more striking was the paralysis of all power structures, which were no longer able not only to help the country, but even to themselves. All of them dutifully followed the vague path where the magic "pipe" called.

Even the unshakable Lubyanka was losing its granite-proletarian image.

The First Main Directorate (foreign intelligence) - the pride of the organs - convulsed from the betrayal of foreign residents, unprecedented in the history of the secret services, who defected to the West in dozens. At one time, one incident was enough for the head of this department to either be shot or expelled from his post to an eternal boarding school in some nook not marked on the map. And now the head of this department, General Shebarshin, receives only thanks and promotions. One might think that such a number of traitors running towards the enemy is some kind of cunning reconnaissance operation, for the implementation of which awards and ranks rely.

And in his native Department, the situation was already close to panic. There was an order to release from places of detention all those serving sentences under Articles 70 and 190 of the Criminal Code. They still remained in the camps convicted under Article 64 for treason, but knowledgeable people said that, apparently, they would have to be released. The creative work of several generations of Chekists has gone down the drain for at least three decades. The anti-Soviet and traitors who arrived from places of deprivation of liberty were already openly demanding the blood of operatives and investigators who had once seized them from

Soviet society, in order to avoid obstacles in the way of building communism. The authorities, as best they could, encouraged their subordinates, but they themselves, apparently without noticing it, lost their former firmness. The eyes of the generals were frightened, even during briefings.

KGB analysts - the elite of the nation, as devoted journalists liked to call it - disappeared somewhere one by one. Even Colonel Kudryavtsev, Kumanin's former boss, met him at the canteen, sat down with him with a cup of coffee and started talking about how "it becomes impossible to serve." "All this camp trash appeared in Moscow, and I don't know what to do next." Further, he said that in one of his "newspapers" Kudryavtsev, his last name was placed next to the words "strangler of freedom and publicity." The newspaper was dispersed, but he is sure that it is

just the beginning.

"Here," Kudryavtsev explained, "it's not some kind of improvisation, such improvisations are impossible in our country, but someone's directed policy to discredit the authorities. Since the surname appeared in print, it means that scapegoats have already been planned to save those "goats" above. Now," the colonel continued, finishing his coffee, "we must dive somewhere deeper, and when the time comes, emerge in the right place. And you, Sergey, I advise you to do the same. Your last name appeared on enemy voices not by chance. This means that you were also planned to be slaughtered on the Talmudic altar. Jews like you and me do not forgive.

Kumanin did not utter a word, chewed some salad, but listened attentively. "Indeed, what is he doing now, when the country is pounding in convulsions, very reminiscent of agony? Looking for the grave of the last Russian Tsar! Maybe go after those who have already dived? Some have already surfaced in cooperatives, in joint ventures and on some dark exchanges. Disgusting!"

The former head of foreign counterintelligence of the 1st Directorate, General Belugin, who was once awarded the Order of the Red Banner of War for organizing the murder of the Bulgarian dissident Markov in London with a poisoned umbrella (exotic and a flight of creative thought!), An expert in wet cases of the highest class, suddenly announced that he did not can serve more in such a criminal organization as the KGB. His voice sounded loudly at democratic rallies and on television with demands to punish the "criminals from the Lubyanka", although, of course, it was necessary to start with him. Following their boss, his "legendary" subordinates quietly disappeared from the horizon: Colonel Nechipurenko, who once supervised Lee Harvey Oswald, Colonel Tikhoy, who worked with Agdzha and organized an attempt on the life of the Pope, Colonel Tiusov, who directed the work of the Jackal-Ilyich himself. Experienced "rats" were the first to feel something was wrong on their "ship", and they were drawn to a well-deserved rest. During their fruitful and hard work in the KGB, they all acquired doctoral degrees in history and economics, and therefore could easily change the stormy service to a quiet academic life.

It was ridiculously easy to defend dissertations in history and economics at the Lubyanka. The topic is closed, the opponents are closed, the defense is closed. One or two - and you are already a candidate or a doctor. Kumanin was also offered to defend himself, even the topic was close, according to the profile of the work: "The Crisis of the Autocracy and the Great October," but he kept shrugging it off: "He will succeed." I wanted to become a lieutenant colonel. If things go on like this, then maybe it won't be in time."

In order to distract himself from gloomy thoughts again, Sergey turned on the TV again. The program "Time" was on. An airliner turned importantly on the screen. The announcer's voice was broadcasting: "Comrades Yakovlev, Medvedev, Shevardnadze, Ligachev and other officials met the General Secretary of our Party at the airport." M. Gorbachev, smiling broadly, was descending down the ladder together with his wife.

Kumanin stuck to the screen, hoping to see General Secretary General Klimov in the retinue, but he was nowhere to be seen.

was seen. In addition to the Gorbachevs, only Colonel Medvedev, head of the secretary general's bodyguard, from the 9th Directorate, got off the plane. And among those who met modestly stood in the backyards the head of this department, General Plekhanov, whom Gorbachev did not even honor with a handshake: "Attendants!"

It was already past eleven when Kumanin called Nadya again. Lidia Fyodorovna had already gone over to crying.

- Nadia did not come and did not call. I don't know what to think. I called all I could: hospitals, morgues, ATC departments. Nobody knows anything. The Department of Internal Affairs refused to accept the application, it is necessary to be absent for at least a week to start the search. The attendant comforted me: "I went on a spree somewhere."

"Seryozha," Lidia Fyodorovna asked, "can you find out something?" Call somewhere, and then me. She began to cry again, and short beeps were heard in the receiver.

Kumanin called the operational duty officer for the city from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. He, of course, was not there, probably asleep. But the operational assistant turned out to be an acquaintance of Kumanin - Major Ragozin. Once upon a time, back in the Andropov times, some of the young KGB officers were transferred to the Ministry of Internal Affairs "to strengthen personnel." Thus, the late Yuri Vladimirovich planned to seize the office of General Shchelokov from the inside. Many of those who were ordered to become "cops" considered this the end of their own lives. Some even wanted to shoot themselves, but nothing - they took root. Some people like the police even more than the KGB.

"The work is real, alive, and the games that are played in the Lubyanka are incomprehensible to anyone. I'm glad I left," Ragozin once said to Kumanin when they were both still lieutenants.

"Seryozha," Major Ragozin was surprised when Kumanin identified himself. "How are you, old man?"

"It's all right," Sergei replied. - I'm here, Borya, on business. Look, among the incidents in the city today, Shestakova Nadezhda Nikolaevna does not appear, about 30 years.

- Familiar? Ragozin asked.

"A witness in an important case," Kumanin lied, "disappeared. Very needed.

"We'll see," muttered Ragozin. I'll call you from another phone. your number at me lit up.

He called back quickly and said that there was none. There are two unidentified female corpses, but they are much older. This has not been reported to hospitals.

"Except in the sobering-up station," he suggested. "But they don't give us data from there, unless some kind of emergency happens.

Where could she have gone? Kumanin sighed into the phone. - That's the trouble...

- Where to fall? asked Ragozin. - In Moscow, an average of ten thousand disappears every month. With ends. Do you have a photo of her? If we really need it, we'll show it on a Moscow television program or put it on some program like Vzglyad. How long has she been missing? Missing today? Well, you, Seryoga, give! Gone is when there is no month. No matter where she could go. Hanging out with friends or something. She is married? No? Well, some guy has some kind of swelling. Thirty-year-old women cannot live without a man for a day. No, except for jokes, I took note of it. You yourself look. You receive more information on the green channel than to us. But she will not appear - photos came

and a verbal portrait, there are all sorts of moles, if any. For identification.

Kumanin felt uneasy. He once kissed all Nadia's moles, and now, imagining Nadia lying on a cold table at the identification in the morgue, he felt an attack of nausea. Due to the specifics of his service in the KGB, he rarely had to deal with corpses, but he did not experience any emotions. And then something went wrong from one thoughts.

Under the influence of a conversation with Ragozin, Kumanin wanted to call some of Nadya's friends, whose phone numbers he knew, but changed his mind. If Nadia had stayed with some friend or, say, with a friend, she would definitely call home. Relations in her family were well known to Kumanin. Nadia simply adored her parents, and could not make them so worried. Since she has not called so far, it means that she either died or is unconscious, which is unlikely. She had documents and if she got to some hospital as a victim of an accident or a criminal attack, then from there they would definitely report this to the Central Internal Affairs Directorate. Most likely, she is alive and well, but she cannot call, and this is very strange. If, say, she is arrested right on the street, then investigators from the prosecutor's office and the police, even the KGB, allow her to immediately call her relatives home or call them themselves. Not right away, but within three or four hours for sure. There are, of course, exceptions when the fact of the arrest of a person in the interests of the investigation should be kept secret. So they arrested Penkovsky, Polyakov, Pavlov, Tretyakov on the street. But they were seasoned spies who turned inside out all the state and military secrets of the Soviet Union. So they arrested one leader of a gang of murderers, "removing" him from the train right at the station upon arrival in the capital. And Nadia? What could the director accuse her of? The biggest one is the theft of baby food. Even if this were so, even if she stole a year's supply of baby food throughout Moscow and the Moscow region, she would have been arrested at work, they would have taken her home for a search, and from there they would have been taken to a temporary detention facility. Could Nadezhda do such a thing to be grabbed on the street, like Penkovsky? Unfathomable. Maybe she was lured on the way to the boarding school, and then killed or kidnapped? And for what?

Of course, the statistics of capital crimes record all sorts of cases, including "rare" ones, such as "dismemberment." For example, at a bus stop, a baby comes up to a woman and says: "Aunty, our kindergarten has closed. Mom is at work, but I can't open the door. Please open. I live in that house over there." The woman goes, opens the door. Then the baby's parents drag her into the apartment, kill, undress, dismember, lay out the remains in bags and carry them to automatic lockers of different stations. And they sell clothes. But such exoticism happens in Moscow no more than once every five to seven years. No, no logical explanation for the disappearance of Nadezhda could be found. Nadia left the house at about half past seven in the morning, when it was already light and the streets were filled with people hurrying to work. The stop of the trolley bus, on which Nadia got to the metro station, was almost directly opposite her house. There were three stops to the subway. Then three more stops had to be taken by the metro without transfers and a little walk - from the metro to the boarding school was no more than two hundred meters. The road went along the boulevard, always very busy.

Kumanin remembered that there were several stalls on the way from the metro to the boarding school. One - "Soyuzpechat" - was located about twenty meters from the metro station. A little further there was a tobacco kiosk, decorated with the emblem of the Java-Moscow factory, then a vegetable one. And almost at the very boarding school, the booth "Mosgorspravka" was tucked away. If something happened to the girl, then, most likely, it was on this segment of the path. Tomorrow I will have to walk through these stalls, show Nadia's photo and ask people questions. Maybe someone saw it. In our time, nothing can be done unnoticed, there will always be an old woman bored at the window, sometimes even with binoculars, capable of frustrating all the plans of both criminals and organs.

If General Klimov did not show up at the office before lunch tomorrow, Kumanin decided, then in the afternoon he would take up a private investigation. He did not dare to call Nadia's parents again. If Nadia had appeared at home or called from somewhere, they would have informed him about it themselves.

After supper with sausages bought at the buffet and a glass of fermented baked milk from a bag, Kumanin re-read the explanation of the headmistress of the boarding school and looked at the photograph of Alyosha Lisitsyn. He still couldn't get rid of the impression that he had already seen this boy somewhere, but where? "What did his parents have to do so that a whole brigade of the KGB rushed to the boarding school and removed this child from there, since a boy at that age could not do anything himself." Kumanin did not take into account the fact that there was a policeman among the KGB officers who visited the shelter - he himself had a police uniform hung in his office just in case. In certain circumstances, this uniform has a calming effect on people, and this allows employees in civilian clothes to calmly do their job.

And what does it mean "a boy does not remember his parents"? The child, perhaps, does not remember, but the police must have established something?

"You may have to go to colleagues in Rostov Veliky, where they found the child, and find out the details of his appearance on the Yaroslavl highway."

At the beginning of the first, Kumanin fell asleep, considering that the mornings are wiser than the evenings. He dreamed of Nadia with a child in her arms. She stood with her back to him, the baby's head resting on her shoulder. Kumanin did not see their faces, but realized that Nadya was holding Alyosha Lisitsyn in her arms. Sergei called her, but she did not react at all, then he shouted: "Nadya!", But she slowly passed through the wall and disappeared. Kumanin rushed to the wall, trying to find the door. He rushed along the wall, feeling it with his hands, but did not find a way out. Panic took over. The room, which seemed large, turned into a small closet. The walls were closing in on him. It seemed to him that they were about to crush him. He screamed in his sleep and woke up.

The luminous hands of the alarm clock showed half past six in the morning. Kumanin lay on his back, looking into the graying rectangle of the window.

"Crap! Why didn't he think of this yesterday? "Nadya was taken away by Klimov's people. They also needed a pediatrician for the child!

But why exactly Nadia? Firstly, she had already worked with Alyosha Lisitsyn and knew him quite well as a teacher and doctor. This made it possible to do without new people who would have to be brought up to date. The fact that Klimov was not in Moscow meant absolutely nothing. He was one of those people who can even give orders to his subordinates from the grave. Secondly, Nadia is an ideal "find". Not married, no children of her own. There are parents, but they can suddenly disappear or die, as happened, say, with the parents of Lieutenant Ilyin, who shot at Brezhnev (on the personal order of KGB General Tsvigun). A very interesting picture emerges. Guessing could do credit to Major Kumanin's deductive abilities if he could answer the question, who is behind all this? Why does a KGB brigade arrest a five-year-old kid in a boarding school, and then in broad daylight kidnap his teacher in the city center?

Without answers to these questions (and there were no answers), the entire logical chain constructed by Kumanin looked like an amusing fairy tale, nothing more. If he told it to anyone, anyone would ask him the question: "Why did they need a child?"

Once upon a time there was an abbreviation DVN - Children of the Enemies of the People - which included children under the age of twelve. Starting from the age of twelve, a citizen of the USSR was subject to full criminal liability, up to and including execution.

There was another abbreviation - CHSVN - Members of the Family of the Enemies of the People.

So, even DVNs, if they were already in shelters or children's homes of the NKVD, were not touched, allowing them to grow up to the age of full criminal responsibility. True, sometimes there DVNs died for one or two months like flies in November, but these were already excesses local chiefs.

And now? Does the party really have such enemies that such measures should be taken against its young descendants? And then, why then for the arrested baby to call a personal pediatrician. "Okay," Kumanin sighed, "we'll figure it out. A person can disappear without a trace in Moscow only if no one is looking for him. Otherwise, there will always be some traces.

He got up, took a shower, did twenty push-ups on the floor, then, out of a habit instilled from childhood by his father, carefully made the bed, dressed and, before going to work, called Nadia again. Her father, Nikolai Kuzmich, answered the phone:

— Lidia Fyodorovna became ill during the night. They called an ambulance, gave an injection. Now she is sleeping. Could Serezha today, if time permits, call on them? Need to talk.

Kumanin promised. Then he hastily prepared coffee, drank it without much pleasure and went to work.

IV

"Top secret.

April 20, 1935.

On the proposal of the NKVD collegium, for the fulfillment of a particularly important state task, to award the senior detective of the NKVD, comrade Alexander Efimovich Lisitsyn, with the second Order of the Red Banner. (Decree of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee of April 15, 1935) ... "

When and for what the senior opera Lisitsyn received the first Order of the Red Banner, it was not clear. It was not clear why the second order was received, but at least the date of receipt was accurately indicated. Kumanin drew attention to the fact that the documents on the microfilm were carefully weeded, and this did not make it possible to form a complete picture of what was happening. Sometimes there were Lisitsyn's reports, but there were no answers from the leadership, and it happened the other way around: the leadership responded to some requests from Lisitsyn, but the requests themselves were absent on microfilm. There was a lot of room for vague conjectures.

"Owls. Secret.

Operational Commissioner of the NKVD

Comrade Lisitsyn.

Experts assure that the 19th (additional) volume of the Russian Biographical Dictionary, edited by prof. Polovtsev does not exist in nature. Tov. Lisitsyn! Do you really think that if this volume existed, we would not send it to you? There was no such volume. And make sure you don't go crazy there.

People's Commissar ... Yagoda.

Good correspondence between the people's commissar and the opera! It was obvious that the people's commissar was so nervous about some volume of Polovtsev's dictionary that he switched from the official official style of official correspondence to the style of small-town communication of his childhood.

"Owls. Secret.

April 22, 1935.

Senior detective of the NKVD

Tov. Lisitsyn.

I am sending you excerpts from the protocols of interrogations of persons related to the concealment of valuables. Check the accuracy of the readings. Regarding your request, I answer: my personal arrival at your facility is completely excluded. There are good enough reasons for this, believe me. However, I report weekly on the state of affairs to the Politburo (personally to Comrade Stalin). Therefore, you have nothing to worry about. Comrade Stalin promised that he would make a final decision on the question you raised in the near future. Be vigilant and extremely careful. The enemies of our people, who dream of restoring the power of the landowners and capitalists, have again begun an active struggle, using the degenerate members of the Party and the Trotskyists.

People's Commissar of the NKVD Heinrich Yagoda.

Application:

"From the protocol of the interrogation of the accused Vasilyeva Lidia Ivanovna on August 28, 1934.

Question: Your children mention that the royal values were indeed transferred to your husband Vasiliev Alexei. After the death of your husband, these valuables, of course, should go to you. Can you tell me where they are hidden?

Answer: I do not deny that the royal family really transferred the valuables to my husband Alexei, who kept them secret from me and did not give them to me before his death, so I do not know where they are now hidden.

Written down from my words correctly and read by me.

To this, Vasilyeva.

Interrogated: signature.

"From the testimony of Alexander Petrovich Kirpichnikov, given during interrogations from November 1933 to December 1934. During some interrogations, special methods of investigation were used against the accused.

Question: Citizen Kirpichnikov, you have been arrested as a former confidant of Nicholas II and are accused of concealing from the people the valuables personally handed over to you by the former tsar for safekeeping. What can you show on the merits of the charges brought against you?

Answer: I really was a clerk under Nicholas II, when he was already under arrest in Tobolsk. He never received any valuables from the latter and never passed them on to anyone. I don't understand how you know this?

Question: We know a lot. Citizen Kirpichnikov, I advise you not to lock yourself up, but

honestly admit your guilt, which will give you the opportunity to hope for a mitigation of your fate. You were not a clerk, but a person close to Nikolai Romanov. Otherwise, why did you have secret conversations face to face?

Answer: What conversations, authorized citizen? I saw the king three times on a walk, and then from a distance. You are confusing me with someone, authorized citizen.

Question: If you have such a bad memory, citizen Kirpichnikov, then I will remind you. At the end of December 1917, on the eve of the former religious holiday of Christmas, you and Nikolai Romanov retired to a room on the second floor of the former governor's house in Tobolsk and had a lengthy conversation. Nikolai Romanov told you that he considers you a real Russian man, Orthodox, ready to die for Russia. You kissed the hand of the former tsar and expressed your readiness to die not only for Russia, but also personally for him, i.e. for Nikolai Romanov. Then the former tsar told you that what is happening now in Russia is a temporary insanity of the Russian people, which has already happened in history, and led the Russian statehood to temporary death. Once upon a time, the Tatars and Lithuanians managed to temporarily crush the state, later - the Poles and Swedes, now - the Germans and Jews. However, Russia has always had the strength to rise again and enter the historical path prepared for it. Do you confirm that you had such a conversation with the former Tsar Nikolai Romanov, citizen Kirpichnikov?

Answer: How did you know? Who could tell you about it?

Question: I am asking questions here, citizen Kirpichnikov. Nothing can be hidden from the NKVD. So, you confirm that such a conversation took place?

Answer: I don't remember. There was something, of course. How many years have passed...

Question: I will remind you further. The former tsar told you that since Russia has perished, he already feels that he and his family will perish. He told you so verbatim: "Everything is the will of God. If the kingdom that our House led for 300 years has perished, then it is not for us to survive this kingdom. And then he told you, citizen Kirpichnikov, that you take the royal jewels and regalia for safekeeping, explaining that his family was not the owner of these treasures, but the custodian, and they belong to Russia. And he ordered to keep them until Rus' is revived, since all these values are not an adornment, but a symbol of Russian statehood. It was you, citizen Kirpichnikov, who had not the only conversation with the former tsar. If necessary, we will remind you of all these conversations. In the meantime, hand over the entrusted values to the people. I will honestly tell you, citizen Kirpichnikov, that for the time being we seem to be persuading you in a good way, but soon ... Our patience, you see, is not unlimited. I want to tell you that by the very fact of communicating with the former Nikolai Romanov and hiding his currency, you have fully deserved the highest measure. And to criminals of this kind, i.e. to the enemies of the people, we have every right to take necessary measures ... Do you understand? It is better not to aggravate your situation and hand over all the currency and other valuables. Or will you continue to claim that you know nothing?

Answer: I personally know that Alexandra Fedorovna herself was in charge of all the valuables, and she hid them. The main, I suppose, is with Colonel Kobylinsky, then with the valet Volkov, who is allegedly in Leningrad, and, in my opinion, with the former priest Vasiliev. He himself died, and his family - mother and sons - are in Omsk. The last family should have some of the royal values. Moreover, under Kolchak, on the personal order of the latter, they looked for the sword of the heir Alexei Nikolaevich, supposedly golden, but I did not see it, Kolchak's police also asked me about royal values and whether Nicholas II left any papers. But I answered them that I did not know anything and he could not entrust, since I was only a clerk. I don't know anything and can't add more.

The protocol has been read, and I will sign it.

A. Kirpichnikov.

Interrogated: detective of the 8th dep. ECO NKVD

Shilov.

November 12, 1933

Additional testimony Kirpichnikov A.P.:

"I admit that in my first testimony I hid from you that I took part in the concealment and removal of the former royal valuables. In fact, before leaving the royal family from Tobolsk to Yekaterinburg, I personally, on behalf of the tutor Zhiliar Petr Andreevich, who served Tsarevich Alexei, took out the sword. It was yellow metal, gold or not, I don't know, but it shone. He asked me to take me out of the arrest and hand it over to the priest Vasiliev Alexei, and I took it out, putting it in a long box. Arriving at the apartment of the priest Vasiliev, he handed it over to the latter. Where she is now, I don't know. In my opinion, her sons have it ... All the details about the royal diamond values \u200b\u200bare known in more detail by a certain Ivanov Sergey Ivanovich, who was a servant with his daughters. He cleaned everything up and knows exactly what values were and where. I personally did not see, but I heard from the conversation of our employees that a diamond crown was brought from Leningrad, very expensive. But I don't know what he did with, I think that either Volkov the valet, or Colonel Kobylinsky. It seems to me that Ivanov Sergey Ivanovich should know about this. He lived in Tyumen in 1930-1931. As for pearl necklaces, I also saw them at the princesses, but I couldn't stand them, they didn't entrust me where they are - I don't know. A. Kirpichnikov.

December 22, 1933

Additional testimony of Kirpichnikov A.P.:

"I confess that at first I could not remember the questions asked of me earlier regarding some letter that I carried to Hermogenes, but now I remembered that there really was such a case. It was like this: in March 1918, the valet Chemodurov, before the Romanov family was taken to Yekaterinburg, called me, handed over a large package with five wax seals and ordered it to be handed over to Bishop Hermogenes, since the commissar who arrived was supposed to do some kind of search. I grabbed this package, wrapped it in newspapers and, freely passing through the guards, brought it and handed it to Bishop Hermogenes. But the latter, when I handed it to him, told me that he himself was in such a position that he was about to be arrested ... the last - to Nikolai Romanov. A few days later, Chemodurov returned the letter that Hermogen had sent to me and ordered me to give it back to him and go for the package that Hermogen had sent. When he arrived, he did not find Hermogenes, because he was arrested for the religious procession that he arranged around the city. Therefore, I had to turn to Deacon Demyan, who told me that this package was on a mountain not far from the cathedral, where the mother and daughter live. The last one was handed over for storage, because this family always hid all secret documents and even Gergomen himself hid from searches and arrests. Having come to this house to this family, whose name I don't know, and saying who I am and that I need this package that is kept, she gave it to me. I brought it and handed it back to Chemodurov. I don't know anything more...

Question: What was in that sealed package?

Answer: I don't know.

Question: Didn't the king tell you about this?

Answer: Maybe he did. I don't remember anymore. Some papers regarding foreign banks. And something else. I don't remember anymore. Don't suffer anymore...

Question: Everything is in your hands. You don't feel sorry for yourself, citizen Kirpichnikov. Why should you die for these royal crowns and money? Are they yours? Give everything up and go home to your family. We will release it too. So what happened to this package? Where did he go?

Answer: I gave it to Chemodurov. Didn't see it again.

Question: And crowns? Coronation crowns. Where did you hide them?

Answer: I don't know anything about crowns.

Question: Didn't the tsar say to you: "Keep these crowns and the package, Alexander Petrovich. They are the essence of Russia and its future"? Did he say that to you?

Answer: I don't remember what he said.

Question: Do you want a confrontation? c: Answer. Who is it with?

Question: With Nikolai Romanov.

Answer. Joke everyone. Everything I know, I've told you."

"The guys worked with counters not badly," Kumanin thought, turning off the device to take a breath and think about what he had read.

Klimov was still not there, and Kumanin was spinning the film, looking at his watch from time to time, in order to disappear from the administration somewhere after one in the afternoon, fortunately now, apart from General Klimov, he had no bosses. It was possible to leave earlier, but the film interested him more and more every hour, forcing him to forget even about the disappearance of Nadia.

Kumanin caught himself thinking that he was interested not so much in Nadia herself as in the fact of her mysterious disappearance. After that cold shower that she poured on him then, in the car, little was left of the former passion. And now he was more likely not worried about the loss of his beloved, but the excitement of a fairly experienced operative who understands that his intuition will not fail him and that the chain of ridiculous accidents is about to end. He wanted to call Nadia at home, directly from Klimov's office, to get the latest news, but changed his mind. All internal and city telephones of the Lubyanka were tapped by the special department of the KGB. It was never talked about, but everyone knew. This was confirmed by the fact that all the family news of the employees became known to the authorities, not to mention something else. Kumanin turned on the apparatus again.

"Top secret.

Without date.

Commissar of the NKVD

Comrade Yagoda G.G.

A. P. Kirpichnikov was entrusted with huge valuables, which they had to hide together with Colonel Kobylinsky. The gross operational error that led to the execution of Kobylinsky, at present, in my opinion, can only be corrected in one way. Kirpichnikov must be delivered to me, where he will certainly tell everything. Otherwise, I can assure you, he would rather die than say anything definite. After testifying on the totality of his guilt and circumstances, it would be advisable to apply capital punishment to him.

Senior detective of the NKVD

Lisitsyn A.E.

"Owls. secret.

May 7, 1935.

To the commandant of special facility 17, senior NKVD detective comrade Lisitsyn.

Your offer can of course be accepted. However, as the Ural comrades told us, Kirpichnikov A.P. was found dead three days ago in a cell in a remand prison. Comrade Samoilov was put on the lookout. We still need to find out if there is any sabotage here.

Heinrich Yagoda.

This was followed, apparently, by an explanatory note from the Ural comrades who overdid it during the interrogations of Kirpichnikov:

"These investigations definitely establish the malicious concealment by Kirpichnikov of the values of the royal family and, if we add to this, that, being in Tobolsk during the counter-revolutionary uprising of the local bourgeoisie in the period 1920-1921. and the seizure of power, Kirpichnikov A.P. was an active participant in this uprising, fought against Soviet power with weapons in his hands, fighting in the trenches (with a lance and a gun), then Kirpichnikov's goal is clearly visible not to hand over royal values to the Bolsheviks as hated authorities...".

"Owls. secret

People's Commissar Yagoda G.G.

The death of Kirpichnikov, like the death of Kobylinsky, tears almost all the threads of the investigation. Proletarian hatred alone will not achieve anything here. They must understand that in this case we are talking about much more than returning valuables to the state for a certain amount. The last thread in this case is now Kobylinskaya Claudia Mikhailovna, who in the past was the wife of Kobylinsky, a colonel in the bodyguard of the family of the former Tsar Romanov. Kobylinskaya herself was the tutor of the daughters of the Romanovs.

Being in the city of Tobolsk, Kobylinskaya K. M. took a direct part in hiding valuables belonging to the Romanov family. The Kobylinskys personally received a jewelry box, coronation regalia and the precious weapons of the former tsar and heir from Nikolai Romanov. Kobylinskaya K.M. returned with her husband from Harbin and was arrested but later released. Take steps to search.

The commandant of the facility Lisitsyn A.E.

"People's Commissar of Internal Affairs

Comrade Yagoda G. G.

I absolutely cannot understand why you cannot understand such a simple scheme and force me to make excuses. In the period from July 10 to 12, 1918, I was not in Yekaterinburg at all. How long can you write about it? I arrived in Yekaterinburg only on July 14, together with Philip Goloshchekin (which he can confirm) and left on the night of July 16-17. I did not know Yakov Yurovsky before and had never seen him before, so it is unreasonable to assume any kind of relationship with him. Indeed, he was talking about some kind of package, which I had to hand over to Comrade Sverdlov upon my return to Moscow. But he did not give me any package, saying that he would bring it himself. And I didn't pretend to be German at all. Yurovsky himself spoke to me in German, and I answered him in it. I speak not only German, but also French, Italian and English. By the way, Yurovsky and Goloshchekin did not speak German among themselves, but Yiddish, which is similar to German. I was chosen for the trip to Yekaterinburg precisely because I speak German well, as I was accompanied by a team that understands only German. I don't know what they are fantasizing about this topic now, but then no one was surprised. Gather us all together at your place, and I hope we will sort out such a simple matter.

Commandant Lisitsyn.

"Comrade Lisitsyn!

No one accuses or suspects you of anything. I do not at all rule out the possibility that Yurovsky gave this package to Sverdlov, which allowed them to recode the entire scheme, and ultimately led to the death of Sverdlov himself, and soon Lenin. In their revolutionary impulse, they did not understand the danger of the infernal machine that they touched. Of course, the safes of Lenin and Sverdlov were checked long ago. They were stuffed with gold coins of royal minting, diamonds and passports for different names of almost all European and South American countries. The entire contents of Dzerzhinsky's safe was handed over by a special commission of the Central Committee (without the participation of our representatives) to Comrade Stalin personally. In this regard, Comrade Stalin considers that it is necessary to launch an investigation into the personal responsibility of all persons without exception involved in this case, regardless of the posts they currently occupy. However, if the specified package had been found, then the question about it would not have been raised so sharply and at such a high level. There is no doubt that in this case Kirpichnikov was telling the truth, which you were able to confirm. Nikolai Romanov had no other option than to take the package with him to Yekaterinburg. At first he wanted to hide it with the help of Kirpichnikov, but, having sorted out the situation and realizing the precarious position of Hermogenes and other persons whom he could still trust to some extent, he requested the package back. The package was taken from Romanov by Yurovsky, who at first assured that he had handed it over to Goloshchekin, and then to you. I personally am of the opinion that one of them gave the package to Sverdlov. But it is possible that both will refer to you, as they refer to Stojanovic, while they believed that he died or fled abroad. They also seem to consider you dead. Therefore, everything will be blamed on you. Apparently, you have several conversations ahead of you, which in other conditions it would be desirable to avoid. We are trying to prove that it is not right to consider everyone who took part in the events of those years guilty without exception. Many were simply deceived or "did not know what they were doing." Whatever it is, Comrade Stalin wants to deal with it decisively, first of all, with Zinoviev, Kamenev and some others, so that they, like their accomplices, do not take the secret with them to the grave. The sudden death of comrade Menzhinsky and the suicide (as in the text - I.B.) Kirov suggests that a new stage of covering up traces is beginning and it must be stopped by the most decisive measures. Regarding your operational developments, I report the following: Kobylynskaya K. M. was discovered and arrested. On

The interrogation showed that her husband, whose execution seems very suspicious to me, as well as to you, transferred the Pechekos spouses: Konstantin Ivanovich and Anil Vikentievna to preserve the value of the Romanov family. The couple were quickly arrested. At first they denied everything, but at a confrontation with Kobylinskaya it turned out that Colonel Kobylinskaya had given him, among other things, some package sealed with five wax seals. Here is a short excerpt from the protocol of the confrontation:

“Question: Tell me, citizen Kobylinskaya, do you recognize Pechekos Konstantin Ivanovich, did he visit your apartment in Tobolsk, and did you visit him?

Answer: Pechekos Konstantin Ivanovich, presented at the confrontation, is exactly the same Pechekos K.I., about whom evidence was given earlier. Pechekos K. I. visited our apartment in the city of Tobolsk. I personally also visited the house of Pechekos K.I. together with my husband Kobylinsky, and also alone.

Question: Tell me, Citizen Pechekos, why did you conceal earlier during the preliminary investigation that you had repeatedly visited Kobylinskaya's apartment and that you knew Klavdiya Mikhailovna, Kobylinsky's wife well?

Answer: I reject the testimony of Kobylinskaya, because I had never visited them, and I did not know Klavdiya Mikhailovna in the city of Tobolsk at all.

Question: Tell me, citizen Kobylinskaya, do you confirm the testimony given earlier about the transfer of the values of the royal family by your husband Kobylinsky to E.S. Pechekos K.I. for concealment?

Answer: Yes, I fully agree.

Question: Why are you, Citizen Pechekos, hiding these valuables from the Soviet government, or do you not know that there will be a severe retribution for concealing them, and not only with you, even with relatives in general?

Answer: Kobylinsky gave me one package, which I returned to him.

Question: Tell me, when you were at Pechekos K.I., how did he express himself in hiding valuables in his apartment?

Answer (Kobylinskaya): When I was in his apartment, I personally heard from Pechekos K.I. that he spoke about hiding valuables in his house and added that it was well hidden.

Question: Citizen Pechekos, tell me straight - did you receive valuables from Kobylinsky and Nikolaeva?

Answer: I don't remember whether I took valuables from Kobylinsky and Nikolaeva.”

Further investigative actions led to completely unexpected results. When the investigator asked Pechekos about the package given to him by Colonel Kobylinsky and returned to him, Pechekos K.I. unexpectedly replied that he remembered where he kept the values of the family of the former Tsar Romanov, indicating the house that once belonged to his brother. He led the investigation team to the fifth floor of the house, showed the place in the wall where the treasures were allegedly walled up, and, taking advantage of the fact that the attention of the NKVD workers was distracted by tapping the wall, jumped out of the fifth floor window. His wife, Pechekos A.V., who was arrested with him, committed suicide in the cell by eating an aluminum spoon broken into several pieces. A day later, Kobylinskaya K.M. died of a heart attack in the cell.

What can you say about the possibility of luring, like Kobylinsky, to the USSR the former tutor of the royal children, Peter (Pierre) Gilliard, who currently lives in Switzerland? Submit your thoughts.

Head of the Secret Political Department of the NKVD M. Katsnelson.

Kumanin leaned back in his chair. "Storyline! If all this could be published, what kind of television series would it be. No Semenov even dreamed of! Katsnelson's note, as if for a second, opened before him some kind of bottomless, but seething abyss, capable of swallowing up entire nations and states.

His eyes hurt, and Kumanin decided to finish with the film for today. Handing over the microfilm to the "ensign" and signing in the magazine, he said that he had gone to the archive of the "October Revolution".

- And if Viktor Ivanovich appears? she asked.

"If Viktor Ivanovich appears," Kumanin answered, "he will get me out of the ground."

Chapter 4

I

The seller of the stall "Soyuzpechat", decorated with a badge of a participant in the Great Patriotic War and two rows of medal bars, barely glancing at the police certificate presented by Kumanin, became furious and began to yell something about rampant hooliganism and banditry.

- Someone has already set fire to the stall twice, and the windows are broken, read it, every night. And no one cares. When will this mess end?

- You, comrade, do not be nervous! Kumanin encouraged the veteran. "Soon we'll be so busy with them that everyone will be sick." You'd better tell me: have you ever seen this woman? Maybe she was passing by or asking you about something?

The method applied by Kumanin was rather primitive, but it was considered very effective. There were cases when hundreds of KGB and police officers combed entire districts in this way, bypassing all the apartments in hundreds of houses, giving the same photograph or identikit for identification.

The veteran raised his glasses to his forehead and began to examine the photo of Nadia.

"No," he finally said, "I haven't seen one like that. Maybe she was here, but so many people walk, because the metro is nearby. All faces blurred.

Kumanin went further, and, contrary to all the laws of meanness, he got lucky very quickly, if, of course, this can be called luck. The seller of the vegetable stall - a relatively young man of "Caucasian nationality" - at first was frightened, mistaking Kumanin for a new district policeman who had come for tribute. With the old only established coexistence. Suddenly a new one appears and the tribute increases.

But, having figured out what was the matter, he said that his name was Alik Khiliyev, and, wiping his hands on his apron, began to examine Nadia's photograph with interest.

"Saw her," he said, wrinkling his brow. - When did you see it? Yesterday I saw it here - he pointed to a bench that stood on the boulevard near an unsightly poplar. This is where she sat.

- Did you sit? Kumanin asked in surprise.

"She, she," Alik confirmed. - I was sitting on the bench. I also thought: "Ai, what a beautiful woman is sitting." I wanted to give her a banana, but there were no bananas. Only potatoes and beets.

"Just don't fantasize," Kumanin interrupted him. "So you're saying she was sitting on that bench?" And what happened then?

"Then," Alik returned the photo to Kumanin, "a car drove up. She got into it and left.

- Car? Kumanin asked. - What car? Black "Volga"?

- Why "Volga"? - Alik was surprised, - only the authorities drive the Volga, the black ones. "Zhigulenok" drove up, "six", it seems. Light color. She left. She was sitting, apparently, waiting for this car to go somewhere.

"You remember," Kumanin continued to insist. Did she get into the car on her own, or did someone drag her there by force? Who was in the car, noticed?

- The man was some kind, - answered the Caucasian, - not young already. He got out of the car, approached this woman, took her bag, brought it to the car. And she followed him, got into the car next to this man. He put the bag in the trunk. Then they drove. I saw everything exactly.

"What bag are you talking about," Kumanin tried to clarify, "what kind of bag it was with."

"An ordinary bag," Alik shrugged his shoulders, "a big one, for things. Heavy. That man was dragging her, squirming.

Can you describe this guy? Kumanin asked.

Caucasian thought:

- A man, like a man, about fifty years old, maybe more. I didn't even look at him. Like gray. With this one, like her... He ran his finger along the top of his head.

"Bald," prompted Kumanin.

"Yes, yes," Alik nodded, "with a bald head.

- Tall, small, fat, thin? - Kumanin pulled information from the Caucasian. - What was he wearing?

"I don't remember, chief," the Caucasian was obviously tired of this interrogation, "I didn't look at him. He looked at the woman. The woman you are looking for. And I didn't notice the number of the car, don't ask.

Although the stallholder could, of course, confuse something, if not lie, nevertheless, his story completely confused Kumanin. Firstly, Nadia's parents did not say anything that she went to work with a heavy travel bag. She could not do this without being noticed - her mother always accompanies her to work. In addition, the bag, assuming that it contained some of Nadia's things, had to be packed in advance, which would also not have gone unnoticed. If Nadia was going to leave somewhere, she would probably have warned

would parents. The bag was heavy - an unknown man, according to the stallholder, dragged her to the car with visible effort. But how did Nadia drag her from home? Kumanin asked Alik if he had seen the woman approach the bench? Was she alone or not? The Caucasian replied that he had noticed her already sitting on the bench. And the bag was on the ground at her feet. How she got here, he did not see.

Secondly, according to the stallholder, no one kidnapped Nadya. She drove off somewhere, apparently, completely voluntarily with a man who, according to the description, did not look much like some kind of hero-lover.

At the same time, everything happened on the way of Nadia to the boarding school, and to be absolutely precise, then in a five-minute walk from it. All this was more than strange. Judging by the heavy bag, Nadia was not going to come to work at all, but nevertheless she almost completely reached the place of work. If she agreed to leave with someone, then again, taking into account the heavy bag, she could ask this person in the Zhiguli to pick her up somewhere closer to home, and not carry her with a heavy bag all the way to the boarding school.

Stop! Did she take a bag from home? This is another question. The clerk noticed her sitting on a bench with a bag at her feet. But someone could bring the bag or bring it from another place. Where? Of course, from the boarding school. What could be in the bag brought from the boarding school for preschoolers? Of course, children's things. Children's things for Alyosha Lisitsyn. So Nadia knew where he was? But after all, only the day before she came to him and asked for help in finding the child.

Kumanin walked along the boulevard in the direction of the boarding school, continuing to think. Of course, it could not be ruled out that Alik the kiosk mixed up everything or simply invented it in order to "get lucky with the cop." If, nevertheless, he did not lie and did not fantasize, then someone from the boarding school could bring the bag. Some friend of Nadezhda, with whom they work together. But not everyone could decide to fill a bag with scarce children's things, or even food and carry it through the watch to hand it over to the "disgraced" teacher, except maybe some close friend. Hardly, especially knowing the situation in the boarding school in general and Nadia's relationship with the headmistress, in particular. If anyone (and Nadia in the first place) gets caught with this bag, he's finished. Petukhova will inflate the case and will definitely involve the investigating authorities in order to reveal the moral character of the one who writes complaints against her. They will never be cleansed, no matter how good the intentions of the employee are guided. This means that the bag could not be taken out except with the permission of Petukhova herself, it is possible that she herself did it. Then Petukhova, although she looked very frightened, told him by no means everything she knew. It turns out that both she and Nadia were in some kind of incomprehensible conspiracy, if not to say, in an alliance, which, however, could not hide mutual hostility, sometimes turning into hatred, as is often the case with women.

If so, then why did Nadezhda come to him in the evening?

Did she know that in the morning of the next day she had to travel in a Zhiguli with a travel bag tightly stuffed? Did she want to secure some additional cover for herself, or just to ruffle Alevtina Ivanovna's nerves again?

At that moment, Kumanin, walking along the boulevard, turned out to be just opposite the boarding school. He wanted to pay another visit to the headmistress and immediately tried to take her "on a show off", asking about the heavy bag that she handed over to Shestakova yesterday, but, on sound reflection, decided not to do this. Don't do it yet. He has no evidence, and the facts based on the testimony of Alik the stall keeper (by no means recorded, by the way), could hardly be called facts. Deciding for some reason that Petukhova would not go anywhere, since he had an explanation written by her own hand (which is

at the same time as evidence of a violation of the non-disclosure agreement), Kumanin turned back to the metro to go to Nadia's parents.

Nikolai Kuzmich and Lidia Fedorovna lived not far from the house of Kumanin Sr., where Serezhino spent his childhood, on 3rd Parkovaya Street (the Kumanins lived on 5th Parkovaya Street). It was necessary to take the metro to the Izmailovo station or to Pervomaiskaya, and then walk a little. It was possible at the same time to go to my father, take out the mail and water the flowers, as he asked before his unexpected departure. Descending into the subway at the Elektrozavodskaya station, Kumanin chuckled, remembering that General Klimov had given him a very specific task: to find the burial place of the last tsar and his family, and instead, during office hours, he was looking for his missing mistress, even a former one. In the old days, if anyone had told him about it, he would not have believed it. Consequently, those who assert that the whole of Soviet society, including the KGB, are in the process of disintegration are right to some extent. However, Kumanin knew that what he was doing, using official time for personal purposes, was flowers in comparison with the activities of other employees of their vast department. For example, about the curator of the conservatory, they said that he quietly extorted tribute from the musicians. Smiling pleasantly, he could offer: "Either you, Mikhail Aronovich, will give me half of your fee for foreign concerts, or you will never go abroad again. Well, how? (And if this same Mikhail Aronovich gets into a rage and starts to swing rights, then he will immediately go to jail for illegal currency transactions, for trying to drive a Stradivarius violin abroad, or, in extreme cases, for sodomy). One dashing curator in the Rostov region collected tribute from all the existing churches, threatening to close them otherwise as "opium for the people." And in this way he fed the entire leadership of his administration. And when he got burned because of his own greed and began to "inject himself" in front of the Moscow commission, then on the same day he suddenly died in a temporary detention cell from acute heart failure. Such cases, which over time grew into details, like a snowball from a mountain, were told in the Lubyanka with laughter and irony, but without any indignation. "They are to blame for being presumptuous. They would have taken less, and no one would ever have known," this is how, according to rumors, Kryuchkov reacted to another regional scandal. And no one yet understood that the KGB had already fallen into a black web of impenetrable racketeering, which was supposed to, if not disrupt, then significantly slow down the country's movement "along the market path towards universal values," as Mikhail Sergeevich once put it not without pride.

Against the background of all this violation, which Major Kumanin allowed himself to remain unattended, resembled the pranks of an innocent baby pretending to be asleep in order to play with a rattle without interference.

Kumanin's thoughts returned to Nadia again, and he thought that, in fact, he really didn't know anything about her. More than five years have passed since their romance, during which he heard practically nothing about her. He did not even know that Nadya graduated from the evening pediatric institute. About who she communicates with, what kind of relationship she has with her work colleagues, what she lives with - he could only guess about all this. And the image of an exemplary kindergarten teacher in love with her work was, by and large, created by him from the "words of the victim", to use the language of official protocols. "Izmailovsky Park Station," the loudspeaker in the car rasped. "The next station is Izmailovo."

The door was opened to Sergei by a weeping Lydia Fedorovna. Nikolai Kuzmich smoked a cigarette in the kitchen. From their faces one could think that they both returned from Nadya's funeral. Kumanin did his best to reassure the old people.

Nadia did not appear in any reports over the past 24 hours on murders and accidents. He has information that Nadia is alive and well, she just had to leave urgently and could not warn her parents about it. Of course, it's bad, but worrying like that

No need. I'm sure everything will work out. By the way, didn't Nadia take any bag or suitcase that morning, leaving for work? It turns out, no, I didn't. Only an ordinary women's handbag and a plastic bag - an obligatory accessory for all Soviet women who never know what they will turn up in stores during the day.

Although Kumanin spoke only in general phrases, not being sure of any of the consolations he himself had said, Lidia Fedorovna calmed down a little and made an assumption that maybe Nadia's departure had something to do with her dissertation.

- A dissertation? Kumanin was surprised. Is Nadia writing her dissertation?

He was convinced of this when Nikolai Kuzmich put a thick folder on the table in front of him, in which were the introduction and the first three chapters of the dissertation for the degree of candidate of medical sciences on the topic "Pathological changes in child psychology during education in closed preschool institutions." Applicant: pediatrician Shestakova N. N.; leader: Professor Ivanko A. D. Its leader lived somewhere outside the city.

In addition to typewritten and roughly straightened pages, the folder contained two tape cassettes. Flipping through the pages, Kumanin was convinced that the basis of the future dissertation was to be a study of the behavior of Alyosha Lisitsyn, a Russian, five and a half years old, an orphan.

At least one of the reasons for Nadezhda's despair at the loss of the boy became clear - she was deprived of the opportunity to complete her dissertation. Having driven away such cynical thoughts from himself, Kumanin asked permission from Nadia's parents to take the folder with him for literally three days. Perhaps the text will make it clear where and to whom she could go.

"By the way," he asked, "did you call this Professor Ivanko?" Kumanin pointed to the title page of his dissertation. "He is listed as its scientific leader. - According to Alik from the vegetable stall, Nadya was accompanied to the car by a man of about fifty with a bald head.

It turned out, as it often happens, that Professor Ivanko was only listed as a scientific supervisor, and Nadya was talking with some kind of associate professor who was leading the work of applicants in correspondence postgraduate studies. His parents saw him a couple of times when he drove Nadya home by car and went up to them to drink tea. His name is strange - Theophilus. Thirty-five years. He lives outside the city, and he does not seem to have a phone.

Kumanin wanted to ask if Nadia had an affair with this Theophilus, which could explain a lot, but he considered it inconvenient. Finding this assistant professor will not be very difficult, and then everything will clear up by itself.

Nikolai Kuzmich went into another room and returned from there with a framed photograph, apparently standing on a table or toilet in the other room. The photograph showed Nadezhda, smiling, with a boy of about five years old in her arms, in which Kumanin immediately recognized Alyosha Lisitsyn. Nearby stood a tall man with long, almost shoulder-length hair, a blond beard, and a rather strange expression on his face. This, according to the parents, was Theophilus. And where they were photographed, they did not know.

It turns out that either associate professor Theophilus (although he looked more like a free artist from the so-called "cultural underground") attended a boarding school, or Nadya dragged Alyosha to the correspondence graduate school, where she studied. In the background in the photograph, he folded a bush with blackcurrant. As far as Kumanin remembered, there were no such bushes near the boarding school, and also near the institute. True, the children were taken somewhere for the summer, but now it was summer, and the children were sitting in the city. Perhaps the picture was taken outside the city, where Theophilus lives? And Nadia went there with Alyosha Lisitsyn? However, if she studied Alyosha's behavior for her

dissertation, this was not surprising. "I should have asked Petukhova if such liberties with children are allowed or not?" Intuition told Kumanin that he needed to find this Theophilus, although he in no way corresponded to the description given by the seller of the vegetable stall.

"Seryozha," Lidia Fyodorovna interrupted his thoughts. "Do you think everything is all right?" Is Nadia alive?

"Yes, I think so," Kumanin replied. - If something happened to her in the city, even in the region, I would know. I think we'll find it.

In the KGB, they always said "we", making it clear to the listener that he was not dealing with some lone knight, but with a powerful and branched organization, from which they could not hide nobody and nothing.

Although Kumanin said "we", in this case he did not represent any organization, engaging in, in operational language, "illegal improvisations." For these improvisations, if they became known to the authorities, he could fly in great. He could even be expelled from the organs, because what was forgiven to the yellow-mouthed lieutenant (and even then not always), the majors were already unacceptable. "In our business, there is nothing worse than unauthorized actions using one's official position," the gray-haired colonel taught at the KGB school, where Kumanin underwent a year of retraining after graduation. It was not just an oral rule. The structure of the KGB - with its system of subordination, distribution of duties, strict reporting on the work done, constant surveillance of each other, control system - completely ruled out the possibility of any improvisation on the part of employees, regardless of rank. The uniqueness of Kumanin's situation lay precisely in the fact that, being seconded to the disposal of General Klimov, he jumped out from under the tutelage of numerous authorities that were obliged to control his actions. So he received an unimaginable freedom for his position. No one knew (and had no right to know) the essence of the task that the general had entrusted to him. And although this task seemed strange even to Kumanin himself, if not ridiculously funny, it opened up possibilities that he could not have even dreamed of just a week ago. And this happened because the only person who has the right to give him orders, Major Kumanin - General Klimov - for weeks rotated in some transcendental heights, from where such small people like Kumanin are simply not visible. True, from these heights, as from Olympus, thunders and lightnings of bossy anger could strike with unpredictable consequences. But, if you remember that Klimov ordered him to disappear somewhere along with Gorbachev, then there was nothing to complain about. And Klimov ordered to study a top secret microfilm obtained from the archive. What he, although not the whole working day, nevertheless conscientiously did. There is not much unrolled film left, and even if the general unexpectedly appears right today, which Kumanin strongly doubts, he will have something to report. Of course, the "ensign" Svetlana will tell the general about the disappearances of Kumanin from the department in the midst of the working day. But even in this case, Sergei came up with a bunch of reservations, indicating "his reasonable initiative within the framework of the order received."

But, speaking seriously, Kumanin was well aware of the fact that he relaxed precisely thanks to the task received from Klimov. He couldn't shake the feeling that he had been taken away from important matters and forced to do who knows what. "Find the burial place of Nicholas III!" If the top really wanted to know, they could do it instantly. Those people who shot the tsar and his family in Yekaterinburg simply could not fail to note the place of burial in their reports. When shooting any lawyer or shopkeeper in the so-called times of the Red Terror, not to mention the later years of the Great Terror and the very close times of the Permanent Terror, the perpetrators were obliged to record the place of burial. And then they shot the head of state and they don't know where they buried him! For someone to believe in it - "There are no bad ones." Let this place go for some

reasons are kept secret, but not from Gorbachev, right? There are no secrets that could not be revealed to either Kryuchkov or Chebrikov, who has now become a member of the Politburo. One phone call - and in fifteen minutes a document drawn up in the time of Ivan Kalita would be lying on their table, and the original. And then they entrust the case to some major, who, despite all the instructions, is actually not allowed even on the doorstep in any special archive. And this case is, according to Klimov, under the control of the Secretary General himself! Funny. From all this emanated such frivolity that Kumanin lost all desire to show zeal and initiative. And the mysterious disappearance of Nadia generally pushed the problem of the royal burial somewhere into the background. If the authorities decided to use him for some of their own purposes, as they say "in the dark", then let them direct his steps. You can walk through a minefield after receiving an order, but wandering through it on your own initiative is stupid. Klimov will appear, he will report to him his thoughts on this issue. In the meantime, he is absent, he will try to find Nadia, or at least the place where she is hiding. Looking at the photograph with Nadya and the hairy Theophilus smiling happily (only Alyosha Lisitsyn, sitting in Nadya's arms, did not smile), Kumanin felt something between envy and jealousy, although he believed that all feelings for Nadya had long since disappeared into time .

He asked Nadia's parents for permission to take this photo for a while. Refusing the offered tea and promising to call them as soon as he learns anything new about Nadia, he once again tried to calm the old people, but they still noticed that he did not have enough confidence in his voice.

II

Kumanin decided not to return to the Office today and went straight home. On the way, he remembered that he wanted to go to his father to take out the mail and water the flowers. Having given himself the word to go home to his father as soon as possible, Sergey decided not to go back. When he got home, he turned on the TV and, to some surprise, saw Gorbachev again, waving his hat from the plane steps in the company of his wife and Colonel Medvedev. At first, Kumanin thought that there was a repeat of yesterday's report about the General Secretary's arrival in Moscow, but he was mistaken. It turns out that MS Gorbachev flew somewhere again. The announcer gave the necessary explanations: "Today the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPSU, Chairman of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev left Moscow for Bonn on an official visit at the invitation of the Federal President of the Federal Republic of Germany Richard Weizsäcker. Together with Mikhail Sergeyevich Gorbachev, the member of the Politburo of the CPSU Central Committee, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the USSR Eduard Amvrosievich Shevardnadze, Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee Alexander Nikolaevich Yakovlev, and Deputy Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the USSR Ivan Stepanovich Silaev departed. Comrade Mikhail Sergeevich Gorbachev was seen off at the airport by members of the Politburo comrades Zaikov, Ligachev, Medvedev, Nikonov, Ryzhkov, Slyunkov, Chebrikov, candidates for members of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU comrades Biryukov, Vlasov, Lukyanov, Maslyukov ... "

Kumanin turned off the TV. From everything he saw, it could be concluded that General Klimov had not yet returned to the Union, but was waiting for the Secretary General in Germany. Therefore, he has at least a couple more days of almost complete independence. During this time, you need to try to get on the trail of Nadezhda, which, as Kumanin convinced himself, would inevitably lead him to Alyosha Lisitsyn, who, according to the headmistress, was kidnapped from the boarding school by Kumanin colleagues.

Having had a bite, Sergey opened the folder with Nadya's dissertation. In the introduction, she noted that in recent births, more and more children are born with pathological deviations in the psyche from those norms that for years were considered average for a normally developing child. The poles of pathology: from complete idiots, whose brain never manages to be connected to work, to completely incomprehensible "geeks", whose brain works with

much greater intensity than in normal children, but extremely selectively. A child of four or five years old can talk in detail, say, about Bismarck's reforms, but at the same time not know the name of his own parents and much more, which is usually easily absorbed by children of this age. Such cases are much less common than the first Manifestations of complete idiocy with the absence of actually any adequate reactions to the environment must be considered in the same vein and using the same methods, not as exceptions, but as special cases of a general lesion of the central nervous system. "Since cases of selective intensive work of the brain are rare and practically not scientifically described, the study of one of them is the subject of the proposed dissertation, it aims to prove that those incomprehensible causes that block the normal activity of brain circuits, at the same time, excite still unknown centers of the brain brain, anomalous both in terms of volume and in essence of the information stored there," Sergei read. He even shook his head like a warhorse. If someone had told him that Nadezhda was capable of writing such intricate things, he would not have believed in life. How interesting everything turns out! We live side by side, but in fact, we don't know anything about each other. After all, it was not yesterday that Nadia began to take an interest in all these problems! He always thought that her main occupation was wiping the snot off babies and putting them on pots, and therefore he was surprised how one could passionately love such work. Now it became a little clear that strange attitude towards him on her part. Who was he in her eyes? Chekist? What is a Chekist? Perhaps something in between a janitor and a precinct? So, it seems, Herzen defined the concept of "gendarme". True, there were no precinct officers then, only quarterly officers, but these are details. "The study of such anomalies," continued the applicant Shestakova N. N. to write an introduction to his dissertation, "first of all, makes it possible to create a working hypothesis that all or most of the information accumulated by mankind in the process of evolution and historical development is stored in the human brain from birth, but is blocked due to as yet unexplored reasons. And here we are not talking about the transfer of information from parents to children, and so on at the biological or genetic level, but about the presence of a huge amount of information in the brain as a given, embedded in a human being. This information includes extensive, although not complete, information from many (and possibly all) areas of human knowledge. However, the fact that all this information, embedded in a person at birth, is blocked and that for life and creative work, he needs to accumulate the amount of information anew, i.e. to start from scratch, speaks of a general anomaly in the development of people and sets a long-term task to identify this phenomenon. A thorough study of the blocking mechanisms of the brain and their functional relationship with the overall development of the body can create a reliable method for unlocking brain circuits, which will make it possible for thousands of sick children to return to a normal and full life.

Next came the so-called closed part, which should be kept in the first department of the institute. This "closed" part presented statistics on the birth of children with disabilities and pathologies of mental development in the RSFSR (there were no data on the USSR or they were considered top secret) over the past five years. True, there were no specific figures, the graph spoke about the problem no less eloquently. The curve, originating at fairly average rates in 1985, went up like a rocket, reaching cosmic heights by 1989, as in the diagram of the growth in the well-being of workers during the implementation of the current five-year plan.

Further, Nadezhda, as it should be in the dissertation, touched on the history of the issue. However, world statistics over the past three centuries, when they began to form scientific methods for recording and describing such phenomena, displacing religious interpretations, contains a sufficient number of facts that make it possible to preliminary generalize. Then there were numerous examples, starting from some Kaspar Hauser, discovered near Nuremberg in May 1828, who shocked many scientists with his knowledge, despite his age, and soon died under mysterious circumstances, and ending with Lucia Ebober -

a little girl who initiated the so-called Fatima miracle in 1916-1917. Being completely illiterate (she never attended school), Lucia not only spoke several foreign languages, but also freely navigated the intricacies of the then international situation, exacerbated by the blazing First World War.

“Freely operating with the names of countries and cities, the names and positions of state and military figures, both contemporary and gone down in history, an illiterate Portuguese shepherdess 10 years old, who never left her remote village, made a real sensation in the world with a series of political and economic forecasts. Unfortunately, the Catholic Church hastened to stop her prophecies by locking Lucia in a monastery. Its only correspondent was the pope, who received Lucia's revelations in sealed envelopes, which are still kept in the secret archives of the Vatican. Popes changing each other on the Vatican throne do not want to hear about the declassification of these documents. The girl was not subjected to medical examination and ended her life in a monastery. The Church interpreted her mysterious gift from her own point of view, excluding the very possibility of a scientific approach...”

Not only did Kumanin not read about such phenomena anywhere, but he had not even heard of them. He ran through a rather long list of children born in different parts of the world with incomprehensible pathologies with curiosity. It turns out that in the United States there lived a girl born in California, who at the age of five spoke an ancient Indonesian dialect. In total, there were no more than five or six specialists in the ancient dialects of the Indonesian archipelago in various universities and scientific centers in the world. All of them gathered in California, having heard about this miracle, in order to expose the hoax. However, when they heard the speech of a five-year-old girl who not only spoke the language fluently, but also corrected their pronunciation and grammar, pundits were amazed. At the same time, the baby, who had such a phenomenal gift, could not really remember her own name and the names of her parents.

This was followed by a description of a Brazilian boy who, from the age of one, multiplied in his mind seven-digit numbers, extracting roots of any degree, and at the age of three he solved the most difficult mathematical problems, without knowing the name of the city in which lives.

In the final part of the introduction, it was indicated that the applicant, pediatrician Shestakova N.N., had worked for a number of years in closed preschool institutions (boarding schools), conducting a thorough scientific analysis of the development of childhood pathologies. It was noted that the presented work is based mainly on observations of the behavior of a five-and-a-half-year-old boarding school pupil, Alyosha Lisitsyn, who had very rare and little-studied mental anomalies...”

Then came the dark forest, at least for Kumanin: some graphs, tables, incomprehensible formulas, blood tests, all these ESR, leukocytes, hemoglobins, pressure data, urine tests, etc., including height, weight, lung capacity, neuropathological anamnesis and much more, which was completely impossible for a non-specialist to understand. If such a dissertation for some reason got to the KGB officially, then it would immediately be submitted for examination to a research institute suitable for the profile in order to get a standard answer to the questions: is this work of scientific interest or not, whether data or conclusions were used in the work contradicting the Marxist-Leninist theory of knowledge, has the author not fallen into formalism or idealism, and will science suffer greatly if the author has to be removed from society, say, for five to ten years? And since the answers of the experts were programmed with questions, then all attention would have been paid to the last question: should the author be imprisoned so as not to be smart, or still limit himself to

dismissal from work?

Many young scientists, having fallen into despair from the fact that their oxygen is blocked from all sides, began to rush about and went so far as to offer their work for publication in the West. At the same time, they did not think that by doing so they were depriving their country of priority in some scientific discovery, strengthening the scientific potential of the enemy, and collectively committing acts that fully fall under Article 64 of the Criminal Code, which interprets these actions as treason. Such was the fate of scientific works that came to the attention of the KGB, although there was a whole department for the analysis of scientific developments at Lubyanka. But they were mainly engaged in various scientific research and development, stolen or bought in the West. In the course of their analysis, it was necessary first of all to determine their military-applied value, and also to find out whether these works are true or planted as disinformation in order to drive any relevant Soviet industry into a dead end.

Kumanin's train of thought, inspired by Nadya's dissertation, was interrupted by the trills of a telephone call. They called from another city.

Sergei picked up the phone and heard his brother's voice:

"Hi, bro," Andrey Kumanin from distant Dushanbe broke through the crackle in the pipe. "Listen, I can't get through to our old man. Where is he? What about him?"

"He's gone somewhere," Sergei replied, feeling like a complete idiot because he didn't know where his father had gone.

Brother, of course, it was this question that he shouted into the phone.

"Somewhere on my veteran business," Kumanin muttered not very confidently. "I promised to return soon, don't worry..."

The crackling in the pipe stopped and Andrey calmly said:

- I'm not worried at all. I wanted to wish you a happy birthday, because tomorrow is already

Sergei completely forgot that tomorrow is his father's birthday.

Maybe he'll be back tomorrow? brother suggested.

"It may very well be," Sergei was delighted at this turn of the conversation. - You call tomorrow evening, and I will try to call on him.

After talking for a couple more minutes about life and service and having received the same answers to stereotypical questions like "everything seems to be normal", the brothers said goodbye, and Sergey again went to the table where the folder with Nadya's dissertation lay. There was no point in reading further through obscure terminology and even more incomprehensible meaning. It remained only to listen to two small cassettes that were attached to the unfinished manuscript. Kumanin turned on the tape recorder and immediately heard Nadia's voice:

"Alyosha, what was your mother's name?"

"I don't know," answered the child's voice.

"And dad?"

"Don't know".

"But you know your name, don't you?"

"My name is Alyosha Lisitsyn."

"And who called you that? Do you remember?"

"Everyone called me that."

"Who are these all, Alyosha?"

"I don't know who they are. But they called me Alyosha Lisitsyn."

"But who was it - uncles, aunts? How many were there? Where did you live?"

"We lived in a room. The room was big. I don't know who uncles and aunts are."

"Alyosha, what do you call me? Remember."

"I call you Aunt Nadia."

"Clever. So I am an aunt. There are boys and there are girls. Do you understand that?"

"Understand. I am a boy and there are girls. Girls become women and boys become men. But I did not know that women are called "aunts" among you.

"You said 'we'. What does "we" mean, Alyosha?"

"Here, you. In this room where we sit. I didn't know that word before."

"Okay, Alyosha. Where did you live before?"

"In a room, in a big room. There was a big picture there.

"Painting? Was there something painted on it?"

"Yes. I liked her."

"What was painted on it, Alyosha?"

"The Death of Danton".

"What? Danton? Do you know who Danton is?"

"I know. This is a large French battleship. He had five pipes. He was sunk by a German submarine. It was the biggest success of German submariners in the world war before last in the Mediterranean. Aunt Nadia, I won't do it again. Do not be angry".

"No, no, Alyosha. I'm not at all angry with you. I'm scared, but I'm not at all angry. Who hung this picture in your room?"

"I don't know. She always hung."

"And who told you its contents?"

"Teacher".

"Teacher? Was it a man, or was it a woman?"

"I don't know".

"But did your teacher tell you about the war or about wars in general? In what world war did this ship die, what did you see in the picture?"

"It is customary for you to call it the First World War, but this is wrong. Even if we do not count the wars in antiquity and the Middle Ages, then this war was already the fourth world war.

"Fourth?"

"As the concept of the world expanded, world wars covered more and more territories. The Thirty Years' War was already a world war for its time, and the Seven Years' War too. There was also a world war with Napoleon. Even the United States was involved in this war."

"My God! How did you know that?"

"I was reading a book, Aunt Nadia. It was written by James Bernes. She came out in London in 1897. It is called "The War in the Atlantic in 1812".

"Where did you get this book?"

"My teacher gave it to me."

"Your teacher was a sailor?"

"He was not a sailor. He was a teacher."

"Do you know what a sailor is?"

"I know. These are the people who run the ships."

"Okay, Alyosha. Tell me, was there only one painting in that room?"

"Yes. Only one. She was very beautiful: the sea, the explosion and the huge ship. The teacher said that the whole world would perish if it did not wake up."

"God, what are you talking about? Were there windows in your room?"

"Were. With curtains.

"And you never left the room. Did you go for a walk? Well, how is it here?"

"I went for a walk every day. I opened the door of the room and went out into the garden. There were trees and flowers. Birds and animals.

"Beasts? What animals?"

"I do not know them. I asked the teacher, but he said he didn't know either."

"Look at this picture, Alyosha. Were there similar animals in the garden?"

"I don't remember".

"And how did you get to the place where you were brought to us from? Who brought you there?"

"I went out for a walk in the garden, and I ended up there."

"At the bus stop? What happened to you?"

"I want to write, Aunt Nadia."

Kumanin listened to all this nonsense with his mouth slightly open. He even flinched when there was a click, signaling that the cassette was over. He turned it over and began to listen further.

"Alyosha," he heard Nadya's voice again, "why did the teacher hang this picture in your room? Other ships were also destroyed in wars. Why did he choose this one?"

"Because Danton himself was beheaded, so he said. And then the ship was named after him. That people are first killed and then glorified. He considered it strange. Danton could not imagine that his friend Robespierre would send him to the guillotine. No one could have thought that the battleship Danton would sink from one torpedo. The teacher considers all these things to be dreams. He always said that nightmares in a dream can suffocate if you do not wake up.

"Are you sure, Phil? Nadia asked, "What do you say?"

"Yes, yes," drawled a male voice, apparently belonging to Theophilus. - You can't imagine it on purpose. Have you checked his thyroid?

"Everything is within the normal range," answered Nadine's voice. Are you smiling, Phil? I hope you don't think I made him learn all this by heart and retell it in your presence? Have you heard anything about this Danton yourself? About the ship. For example, I don't even know in which war this happened. And you?"

"I have no idea," Phil admitted, "how would I know such things? All over the world, only very narrow specialists have such information. I am sure that in all of Moscow there are five people who know about this. Half of them are registered in the mental dispensary. If a person knows and remembers such things, he is not normal. You can trust me."

"It happened," Alyosha's voice rang out, "on March 19, 1917, off the coast of Sardinia. German submarine U-64..."

"Alyosha," said Theophilus. "Do you understand what you are talking about?"

"I understand," the boy replied.

"What is a submarine?"

"This is a combat ship, which, thanks to a strong waterproof hull and a system of flooding tanks, can operate under water. At one time, gasoline and electric engines were used for this purpose, then diesel, and now nuclear. Although this type of weapon is not yet a hundred years old, it is submarines today that are able to destroy the planet in just a few minutes with their nuclear missiles launched from the ocean depths. The teacher told me..."

There was silence. Then Nadia asked:

"What's wrong with you, Alyosha?"

"Aunt Nadia," the boy said, "you promised me candy if I told this uncle about the Danton.

"Alyosha," answered Nadya's voice, "you can't eat so much sweets. You can get sick."

There was a whimper of a child and the voice of Theophilus:

"Give him candy. What are you, really? Take it, Alyosha, don't cry, little one.

Then Nadia's voice again: "Well, what do you say to all this, Phil?"

"Yes, this is all very interesting," answered Theophilus, "you know, Nagy, in some details it resembles what happened in Fatima. There, the girl spoke as if on behalf of the Mother of God, warning people. And this boy speaks as if on his own, apparently, he is still small to realize that he is just a mouthpiece, and, perhaps, due to some features of the body. You noticed that he turns on and off, and when he turns off, he behaves quite adequately for his age. So did Lucia Ebobera in Fatima. Although she was a little older than Alyosha. How old was she? Do not you remember?"

"It seems like 9 or 10," Nadia said. "I'm constantly trying to figure out what you're trying to say, Phil, but I can't quite figure it out. If these children served only as someone's mouthpiece, then whose? This is already an area completely far from science. I would even say that this is already the realm of pure fantasy, not even very science fiction. This is already the level of fairy tales.

"You can, of course, consider everything as fairy tales," answered Theophilus, "if not for one small circumstance. Hundreds of people witnessed the so-called "Fatima Miracle", and Alyosha Lisitsyn would not be sitting next to you on the couch right now. Right, Alyosha?"

"That's right," the boy replied in a slightly slurred voice, probably because of the candy in his mouth. — The Miracle at Fatima happened on May 13, 1917, about a month after the United States entered the war and overthrew the royal dynasty in Russia. The teacher said that otherwise the war would have continued for another fifteen years. And it had to be completed urgently ... "

There was silence again. Then Phil's voice asked:

"If the main mission of Lucia Ebober was to end the First World War, then you, Alyosha, why did you come here?"

"Where?" the child asked.

"We have," Phil insisted, "here."

"Aunt Nadya brought me," Alyosha answered and added: "By car."

The tape is over. Kumanin sat for a few more moments, staring blankly into the silenced tape recorder, then picked up the second cassette.

The room was filled with a cheerful melody: "A river begins with a small stream, well, friendship begins with a smile ..." Kumanin even shuddered in surprise, but listened to the song to the end with pleasure, remembering that this is a melody from some children's cartoon. The song ended, it was replaced by another: "Antoshka, Antoshka, let's go dig potatoes ..."

Both sides of the second cassette were filled with children's songs and fun tunes. Apparently, Nadia used them for classes with children in her group. Having scrolled the tape at high speed and making sure that it contained nothing more than children's songs, Kumanin turned off the tape recorder. He wanted to listen to the first tape again, but changed his mind. If what he heard is not a hoax, then you can, of course, die of surprise. However, Nadia has never been distinguished by a penchant for fantasies or cheap escapades. She was always a very serious girl, she studied well, her teachers considered her very conscientious, and her friends considered her a little out of this world. Now, at least, it became clear why Nadya ran to him in search of the missing Alyosha. She told him about the amazing abilities of this child, but he, of course, could not imagine anything like this until he listened to this tape. However, he reacted more to

the surname of the baby by association with the surname of the mysterious opera. Yes, here a fragment of a telephone conversation of General Klimov, of which he became an accidental listener, also played a role. Of course, if all this is not some kind of linden and in Moscow, such a kid really appeared, then somewhere at the top a little commotion could well begin. And because of this, all further events related to Alyosha Lisitsyn, the boarding school and Nadya Shestakova acquire some logic. "Fatima Miracle" He had read about it somewhere, but he couldn't remember where. It seems that some pamphlet told about the tricks of the church circles, trying to confuse the heads of the common people and make more money. There were listed various machinations of churchmen in old Russia and in other countries. I remember it spoke of a large-scale hoax organized by the tsarist secret police, who allegedly discovered the relics of Seraphim of Sarov, almost on the orders of Nicholas II himself. Among other things, there was also a mention of something similar in the Portuguese city of Fatima. But, judging by the tape, Nadia and Phil were talking about this event quite seriously. What about Danton? What is Danton? And what about Danton?

It seemed that Alyosha Lisitsyn was simply mocking adults. This is typical of young children who think they know something that adults have no idea about. The usual reflex like "I know, but I know ...". The child gets pleasure when he is convinced that adults "really" have no idea about what he condescendingly told them. The same condescending notes were heard on the tape in Alyosha's voice. It would be interesting to look at the same time on the expression on his face and on the expression on Nadia's face too. Who hammered all this completely unnecessary knowledge into a child? Teacher. What kind of teacher? The person would establish this, if the teacher may say so, and bring him for experiments on minors. Recently, so many different magicians have divorced and - how are they? - psychics. Inspire children with all sorts of nonsense. They probably stole Alyosha Lisitsyn from some orphanage, or maybe they bought or issued fake adoption papers, and then left him in Rostov at a bus stop. If you get permission for an official investigation, then this whole story can be untwisted in a day. Teacher! He didn't even tell the boy his name. Experienced, apparently, a swindler! However, if his colleagues took the boy from the boarding school, then someone is already conducting an investigation. Perhaps new, of course, secret, psychotropic drugs were tested on Alyosha. Perhaps this can explain the interest of the KGB in this child. The boy was taken away from the boarding school, of course, in order to contact the teacher and arrest this scoundrel. But then what about Nadia? Like it or not, but so far it has not been possible to tie all ends in this matter.

Kumanin remembered how his first boss, Lieutenant Colonel Volkov, to all introductory reports coming from above and incomprehensible reports coming from below from subordinates, always used to say with a smile: "Nothing, we'll figure it out." "We'll figure it out," thought Kumanin, but immediately remembered that no one authorized him to understand this matter. With that thought, he climbed into the shower and then fell asleep.

III

"Top secret

August 17, 1936

Captain of State Security

Comrade Lisitsyn AL

Your explanation was reported to the People's Commissar. However, he believes that you, like Goloshchekin and Yurovsky, do not finish something and do not want to bring final clarity to this matter, which is a matter of special state importance, and do not think about the consequences not only for you, but also for many others.

Yurovsky and Goloshchekin consider it completely out of the question to leave the package in Yekaterinburg in 1918 in anyone's hands and continue to insist that you took the package to Moscow. Comrade Lisitsyn! Your party and KGB discipline is not in doubt among any of the leadership. However, if you, having handed over the package to Sverdlov, Dzerzhinsky or Comrade Lenin himself, gave the "Bolshevik oath" known to you to remain silent, then now your duty is not to keep this secret, but to disclose it, since such is the demand of your leadership. You know what killed your comrades. They keep on dying, and you can ruin with your silence

everyone.

You are now in a particularly privileged position, but this position will not last forever. And you will die along with everyone else. At least understand this.

Agranov Ya.S.

From now on, all correspondence should be directed to my name.

"Top secret

Without date

Deputy People's Commissar of Internal Affairs

comrade Agranov Ya. S.

I don't quite understand what information you want from me. I saw Sverdlov and Dzerzhinsky once in my life before my trip to Yekaterinburg in 1918. I never saw Comrade Lenin at all. Indeed, Comrade Sverdlov instructed me to take some package from Yurovsky. I did not know anything about its contents then, and Comrade Sverdlov mentioned this case in passing, without emphasizing the importance of this task. I went to Yekaterinburg with a completely different purpose, and when I informed Yurovsky about Comrade Sverdlov's request, he at first agreed to send the package with me, but then, in a hurry, apparently forgot about it. Just before my departure from Yekaterinburg, I reminded him of Sverdlov's order, but the package at that moment was not in the premises of the House of Special Purpose. It was in Comrade Yurovsky's safe in the city. We had no time to lose, since we were already very late, and I had to leave Yekaterinburg long before dawn, so as not to put the whole operation in jeopardy. Yurovsky said that he would bring the package himself, and I did not object. You know the goals with which everyone appeared in Russia, from Lenin to me. These goals not only did not correspond, but were almost the complete opposite of the goals that our party and its leaders are now setting before the country. At the time of our appearance in Russia, other movement groups appeared with their own tasks, which, in principle, corresponded to the creation of chaos. No one understood the danger of entering this tunnel.

I personally reported all this to Comrade Stalin a month ago during the stay of the leader of our party and people at my facility. Comrade Stalin agreed with my arguments and expressed the opinion that the package was apparently handed over by Goloshchekin through Dzerzhinsky to Parvus, after which the latter disappeared.

There is not the slightest doubt that the package was intended for Parvus. However, the testimony of my sources makes it possible to assume that the package, after being handed over to Colonel Kobylinsky, was not returned to the last tsar, but was taken abroad. Another version is also possible: Kobylinsky returned the package to the tsar, he handed it over to Yakovlev (Myachin), and he handed it over to Sverdlov. You understand as well as I do that Sverdlov is completely

could, without informing either Lenin or Dzerzhinsky, immediately forward the package to Parvus. This is confirmed by his quick death. It seems to me that then Sverdlov and Goloshchekin could simply stage the loss of the package, trying to gain time. I perfectly understand the importance of this matter, but, unfortunately, I can't help in any way, at least because of my own isolation.

Commandant of facility 17, captain of state security

Lisitsyn A.E.

"Owls. Secret

February 26, 1937

People's Commissar of Internal Affairs

Comrade Yezhov N.I.

I never met Yagoda, the enemy of the people, and did not even see him in portraits. For me, he was my boss, whom the party put over me. We were connected only by official correspondence, which is easy to verify by reading copies of his instructions and my reports. I did not and could not take any part in the treacherous and wrecking activities of Yagoda, the enemy of the people.

Major of State Security Lisitsyn A. E. "

It turns out that Lisitsyn was a major, not a captain, as Nikitin's filing cabinet indicated. Kumanin took a breath and turned off the apparatus. General Klimov still did not appear at the office. Ensign Svetlana was already besieged by Klimov's deputies and assistants, who had accumulated many problems that only the general himself could solve. It was Saturday, like any other Saturday - a normal working day at the Lubyanka. True, many took advantage of Klimov's absence and the general decline in morals (hence, discipline), as well as the fine weather, and on Friday they went to their dachas located in the most picturesque places in the Moscow region. However, only colonels and higher ranks could afford such liberties. Ordinary employees worked hard, as usual. Even Sunday was not a guaranteed day off for them. At any moment, an introductory message could arrive, confusing all plans for Sunday. There was nothing to talk about the holidays - they were always worse than any everyday life. Sometimes, on holidays, services at the Lubyanka were transferred almost to a barracks position. Having already become a major, almost a Sunday later Kumanin was on duty either in the administration, or in the city, or stuck around in some kind of unspoken cordon. The authorities well remembered that he was a bachelor, and used this circumstance to the maximum.

The unexpected transfer to the disposal of General Klimov, among other things, freed him from outfits and other turbulence such as physical training, fire training and political studies, which was mandatory for all officers, including lieutenant colonels. The colonels could already afford to relax in everything, except for political studies, visits to which were carefully monitored. Several passes in a row could very painfully and very unexpectedly backfire at the most inopportune moment, for example, when applying for a business trip abroad or during certification for promotion. Kumanin, after Klimov pulled him out of the department, had already missed one political lesson and remembered it well. Here, on the peaks close to Olympus, no political studies were carried out, which was also considered one of the privileges

big bosses.

Kumanin hoped to watch the tape before lunch, and then disappear again unnoticed and start tracking down the traces of the missing Nadezhda. He turned the machine back on.

"Owls. Secret

July 20, 1937

Comrade Stalin I.V.

Dear Comrade Stalin.

Since I have been instructed to contact you directly on issues related to Object 17, without my direct supervision, I ask you to provide us with the possible assistance in the following matter. Urgently need a specialist doctor to remove adenoma. This disease is not rare. It affects all men of advanced age in one form or another. Being launched, it may well pose a threat to life. I understand how inappropriate it is to take time from you, the Great Leader of our people, to resolve such issues, but according to Instruction 12-A of January 10 of this year, I am instructed to contact you only on all issues. Once again I apologize.

Commandant of Object 17 Senior Major of State Security

Lisitsyn.

Lisitsyn had already become a senior major, that is, he wore two rhombuses on his buttonholes, like an army commander! His career went uphill after Yagoda was replaced by Yezhov. It was obvious.

The next document was the last page of some seized material. She, apparently, fell under the lens of a microfilm camera by accident, due to the inattention of archival workers. It read: "Total - 27 million 862 thousand gold rubles. Preliminary assessment. And a signature.

Kumanin peered attentively: isn't this the signature of Stalin himself? No. Does not look like it. So Instruction No. 12-A was in effect for a short period, after which the chief stopped dealing with Object No. 17 personally.

"Top secret

December 20, 1939

Comrade Lisitsyn.

We have already reported that Yurovsky died without saying anything. Goloshchekin was also arrested, but they will no longer work with him in the "Kremlin", but as expected.

You seem to have been right: the package reached Sverdlov through Myachin, who was also arrested. Comrade Stalin believes that everyone should bear personal responsibility for crimes against the people and the state, regardless of what they were guided by and when it happened.

A separate envelope is not for you.

I cordially congratulate you on the Day of the Cheka - NKVD and on the upcoming 60th anniversary of our leader and teacher Great Stalin.

People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs L.P. Beria.

"Owls. Secret

July 8, 1940

Comrade Lisitsyn.

Management considers it entirely possible for any medical professional to enter your facility, subject to certain patient precautions. Comrade Stalin expressed bewilderment at the fact that such a simple question was allowed to develop into a problem.

Deputy People's Commissar V. Merkulov.

"Owls. secret

August 24, 1940

To the commandant of facility 17, comrade Lisitsyn.

The meaning of recent events should be clearer to you than to anyone else. Thanks to the brilliant leadership of Comrade Stalin, it was actually possible to fully restore the state, which was considered virtually destroyed. And not only to restore it in a purely geographical sense (although this is very important), but to make it even more powerful than it ever was, capable of solving all the tasks set by history.

In this regard, Comrade Stalin expressed the opinion that this news should be heard from him himself. The conclusion of the doctor convinced him only that it was not advisable to postpone this event. Moreover, there is also an opinion that the object should have "Regulation 7" - common to all objects visited by the leader of our party and people.

A. N. Poskrebyshev.

"Owls. secret

December 25, 1940

Comrade Lisitsyn!

There is an opinion to make a burial somewhere in the nearest cemetery with observance, if it is really so necessary, of any rites. No one is going to interfere with the desire of the deceased, but it was quite possible to do without any of these old-fashioned prejudices. All the other issues you raised will most likely receive a positive decision in the very near future. Of course, the status of special settlers would be optimal. Yes, I think it will happen.

Yours, Lavrenty Beria.

"Yours, Lavrenty Beria! Great! There were people in our time!"

"Top secret

February 18, 1941

Special folder.

TO THE POLITBURO OF THE CC AUCP (b)

In order to finally cleanse the organs of the NKVD and the NKGB from Yagogo-Yezhov pests and enemies of the people, apply the highest measure according to the list of hostile elements listed below that have penetrated the organs.

People's Commissar of Internal Affairs Beria L.P.

This was followed by a list of 142 people. Lisitsyn was listed fifteenth on the list. Opposite his name was written in an irritated hand:

"Find out where the child was."

On the margins of the list, in Stalin's sweeping handwriting, was inscribed: "I consider it expedient." And a large signature of the leader. Below were the signatures of Molotov, then Kaganovich, even lower - Malenkov and at the very bottom - Kalinin.

The film tongue popped out of the spool and disappeared into the take-up drum. The screen lit up blankly. Kumanin switched off the apparatus with a kind of relief, which comes after watching a horror movie. Although he knew in advance that Lisitsyn would be shot, he did not imagine that everything would happen so casually, especially after he saw the signature under some documents: "Your Beria."

It turned out that the senior major of state security Lisitsyn finally stole some child.

"Lately," Kumanin thought, "I've been coming across some almost mystical stories with children all the time." What kind of child was Lisitsyn's operas "done somewhere"? Isn't it Alyosha Lisitsyn? But then Alyosha must now be at least fifty years old. However, judging by the knowledge, it could well be considered fifty years old.

It was already the beginning of the first. The press conference of Mikhail Gorbachev and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl was broadcast on the radio. Words were spoken: new thinking, universal values and market relations. No one absolutely understood their meaning, and did not try to understand - the authorities know better.

Kumanin handed over the film and told Svetlana that he would be in the archive, where he could be found if the general appeared and demanded to be with him.

Kumanin was going to go to the Nadya Institute and find out in the dean's office of the correspondence postgraduate study the installation data on Theophilus or to find him himself. The dining room, where he went for a bite to eat before leaving, was crowded for a Saturday afternoon. Taking, as usual, a glass of yogurt with a bun, Kumanin, looking around the hall in search of acquaintances, found Oleg Morozov, an officer of the Special Department of the Main Staff of the Fleet, at one of the tables. Like any officer of the Special Department of the KGB, Morozov sported the full uniform of a captain of the 3rd rank with three gold stripes on his sleeve. At one time, he graduated from some institute and, together with Kumanin, was trained at the KGB school.

"Oleg, hello," Kumanin greeted, sitting down at the table with the special officer. - How are you?

"Business is on the Lubyanka," Morozov grinned, swallowing the schnitzel, "but we have only business. How about Serezha? Didn't get a lieutenant colonel?"

"Now you can only get hit in the back of the head," Kumanin answered him in a tone, "I generally heard that all promotions in the committee are frozen for an indefinite time.

- No, - Morozov did not agree, - my documents went. Promised by November. He pushed the plate away and took up the glass of ryazhenka.

"I need one certificate," Kumanin asked.

Morozov shot him an alarmed look.

- What kind of reference?

- Do you happen to know if the French had such a ship "Danton"?

— Danton? Morozov asked. - Danton - this figure was like that during their revolution. I watched the movie. They cut off his head on the guillotine...

"I know that without you," Kumanin interrupted him, "I'm talking about a ship named after him. Was it like this during World War I?"

"Ask something easier," Morozov laughed. - How do I know, especially in the First World War. Yes, I don't know anything about my own, except for the Aurora cruiser.

"Maybe you have some reference books at the headquarters, where you could look," Kumanin continued to insist, "I need it for business, Oleg.

"Wait," the captain said, "we'll do it now." We have one psycho from the retirees in our headquarters - he knows everything. Under Andropov, he was almost imprisoned. Knew too much. The captain of the 1st rank was crushed to him and thrown into the reserve. But without his knowledge, the entire headquarters was as if without hands. Gorshkov himself interceded. I had to leave at work. If you're urgent, I can

"Call, please," Kumanin asked, "I urgently need it.

Morozov wiped his lips with a napkin, and they went to the fourth floor, where the special officers were stationed. They were constantly wanted to be evicted from there, since they also had premises at the "served" military units, and the staff of the Lubyanka was constantly growing, and there was a chronic lack of space for new departments and departments that began to multiply in Andropov times. The military command, for its part, tried to evict them from their premises, referring to the fact that they have places in the Lubyanka. But the special officers, having taken up all-round defense, did not concede, but, on the contrary, from time to time grabbed premises for themselves here and there. "The rod is like Israeli tanks," General Chebrikov himself once mentioned them with displeasure.

In the room where Morozov brought Kumanin, there were two huge safes and two tables with telephones, a portrait of some admiral with a Jesuit face hung - the Spartan setting of a besieged fortress. Morozov picked up the phone:

- Sergey Sergeevich at home? Please ask. Sergey Sergeevich, I wish you good health. Morozov worries. How is your health? So that's great. Sergey Sergeevich, a little help is needed here. I think you can help. He covered the receiver with his palm and asked Kumanin:

"What do you say this ship was called, the Danton?" - and already on the phone:

- Sergey Sergeevich, tell me, please, the ship "Danton" was with the French in the first

world war? - he gestured to Kumanin: "Write it down."

"I'll remember that," Kumanin dismissed.

- What? Was? As many as six of the same type? Great. And what happened to him? Did the Germans drown? When? In March 1917? Well, thank you very much, Sergey Sergeevich. Sorry to bother you. Morozov hung up the phone. "The bottle is off you," he said to Kumanin. There was such a ship. The Germans drowned him in 1917, and he laughed, in honor of the October Revolution.

"Thank you," Kumanin smiled, "did you drown it, then?" But anyway, thank you, - and left the office.

Sergey even felt relieved that what he heard yesterday on the tape was confirmed, and did not turn out to be the delusions of the sick imagination of a little moron. "One issue has been sorted out. Now we need to find out what happened in the same year in Fatima?

Kumanin was already heading towards the exit from the Directorate, but then he suddenly remembered where he had come across a description of the incident in Fatima in 1917. It was in one of the many confiscated books kept in the safes and fireproof cabinets in his office. The book was published in New York in English in 1975. It was called the "House of Special Purpose" and was compiled based on the materials of the former teacher of the royal children, Charles Sidney Gibbs. Prepared for publication by his great-nephew.

Kumanin returned and, having found Kudryavtsev, asked him for the keys to his office and the safe, lying that he had left his tracksuit and some other personal belongings there.

Two long-haired young priests were sitting in Kudryavtsev's cabin, being instructed by the colonel. Therefore, without asking any questions, he went out into the corridor, gave Kumanin the keys and only muttered:

- Carry it with you, or hand it over to Klimov. By the way, Steblikov was interested in your keys, he wants to appropriate all our developments for himself. You'll be a fool if you give it to him. All of them are very for ready...

Kumanin thanked his former boss and opened his office. In fact, this was supposed to be done in the presence of a commission appointed by the head of the department, because if Kumanin, having opened his office, found wide-open empty safes there or just the loss of a telephone set (this happened, too), he would have to answer for everything, and strictly according to the law, punishment could range from monetary compensation to imprisonment.

Rightly believing that even General Steblikov would not steal monarchical literature from him, and that he would somehow pay for the stolen telephone set, Kumanin boldly tore off the seals and entered the room. Among the books in foreign languages - they were collected in one place - he quickly found the book of Charles Gibbs, put it in the briefcase, again carefully sealed the safe and office, and with a sense of accomplishment disappeared from the Office.

IV

Saturday is exactly the day when life in correspondence departments, including correspondence postgraduate studies, is in full swing in all universities of the country. This is exactly what Kumanin counted on when he went to the medical institute, which Nadya graduated in absentia and was now studying in correspondence postgraduate studies.

The head of the correspondence department of the graduate school, a pretty young woman who introduced herself as Irina Sergeevna, instantly broke a smile from her face at the sight of the police certificate presented by Kumanin. The smile was replaced by an alarmed expression, characteristic of any Soviet person who appeared before a representative of glorious law enforcement agencies.

Kumanin asked about Nadia.

— Shestakova? - Irina Sergeevna asked again, - I haven't been for a long time. You'd better go to work with her. She has such a job in a boarding school that there is no free time left. And here's the dissertation. I can give you the address of the boarding school.

— Thank you, no need, — thanked Kumanin, — I know the address of the boarding school. I have another question for you. I need to find one of your associate professors named Theophilus. Do you know this?

— Feofil Pimenovich? the manager asked, "he hasn't been working with us for a long time.

— Is that how? - Kumanin was surprised, - could you tell me his address?

- It's in the personnel department, - said Irina Sergeevna, - I don't know.

Finding out that the personnel department was only open today until two o'clock, Kumanin hurried there - it was already a quarter to two.

The personnel department door was studded with galvanized iron and had a peephole, like a prison cell. In addition to the "Personnel Department" sign, another one hung on the door - "First Department", and therefore the door, having put out only the bell button, was tightly closed.

Kumanin pressed the button hard with his finger. The peephole opened, and Kumanin brought his ID to it. The door silently opened, as it always did after performing such a ritual.

An elderly man in a rumpled suit, which was traditionally decorated with a badge of a participant in the Great Patriotic War and stocks with a standard set of medals, turned out to be the head of the first department. It turned out that personnel officers on Saturdays work purely symbolically and by noon all the inspectors scatter.

"Nothing," Kumanin reassured him, afraid that he would now have to listen to another lecture about the fall in discipline and the absence of elementary order, "I think
that you can help me.

"I'm listening, comrade..." the head of the first department looked inquiringly at Kumanin.

"Major," prompted Kumanin, once more holding his police ID up to the chief's spectacles.

"I hear you, Comrade Major. Please come to my office, - he opened the leatherette-covered door with a sign "Head of the First Department." The tablet was of such size that it could already be considered a memorial plaque.

The office of the head of the first department was small and without pretensions to luxury. It turned out to be full of safes and fireproof cabinets, as if he were not in a pediatric institute, but in the intelligence department of the general staff. In a small opening between a heavily-barred window and a huge safe, a table adorned with a government-issued desk lamp and a pair of black telephone sets leaned back. In another tiny opening between the intimidating steel of the fireproof cabinets was

squeezed in a table with a typewriter of secret office work.

— Are you talking about stealing bathrobes? asked the head of the first department, who introduced himself as Ivan Nikiforovich.

- No, no, - Kumanin even raised his hand, since Ivan Nikiforovich was already preparing to open a thick folder, which, apparently, contained materials of his preliminary investigation into the theft of white coats.

"No, no," Kumanin repeated again, sitting down on a hard stool, on which the employees of the institute called to the first department had to realize their insignificance, looking into the eyes of Ivan Nikiforovich.

"I am interested in one of your employees," continued Kumanin, "associate professor Feofil Pimenovich...

- A! Ivan Nikiforovich perked up. - He comes out and passes along your line.

Has he done anything else? Kumanin asked in turn. — On whose line?

"Comrades came, they were interested," the head of the first department, who knew his business, answered evasively.

"Comrades, for sure, were from the committee, which it was not necessary for some police major to know about."

"We need to interrogate him, he showed up in one case," Kumanin said just as evasively. - I would like to get the installation data for it. And since it worked for you...

"We fired him," Ivan Nikiforovich announced, not without pride. - With a complete inconsistency with the position held. We educate young people, and then it turns out that the teacher is registered in a mental dispensary and carries, you know, who knows what in the classroom. We have a predominantly female contingent here, you know ...

Has he been fired for a long time? Kumanin asked.

- Think about six months. They wanted according to the article, but now the times - you know what. They let me leave of their own accord," Ivan Nikiforovich admitted bitterly. He is a child psychiatrist by training. Immediately after graduation, he defended his dissertation. They said, not without abilities. But then we began to receive signals that in his lectures he was talking about God, about the Divine essence of consciousness, and other bourgeois nonsense. You know, Comrade Major, I served for forty calendar years in the authorities and I know this audience - I immediately gave the command to check if they were crazy. And what do you think? It looks like a cute one. They dug - it turned out that even at the old place of work he was exposed and sent for compulsory treatment with the help of organs. There he also carried some nonsense. It seems that the denial of God hinders the development of science and distorts the very concept of "psychiatry". It was, exactly, in the 79th. They let him out of the psychiatric hospital, he came to us, they don't put stamps in his passport, he hid about the past. As I found out, I immediately reported to the authorities: they say come, take the warm one. I received an answer: now this does not concern us, take administrative measures. I immediately presented to the rector and a copy to the district committee. It's good that there is an article that psychos cannot work in the system of higher and secondary specialized education. And then there would be no government

Did he work as a psychiatrist for you? Kumanin said.

"Psychologist," corrected the head of the first department, "part-time. You see, I dragged some children to my lectures, showed them to students. Where did he take these children and what then with

did them, it wouldn't hurt to find out. Are you about this?

"Approximately," Kumanin avoided answering. I would like to get his address.

"Now we'll do it," Ivan Nikiforovich readily put in, and, rising from his chair, clanged open a powerful safe that would do honor to any bank.

In the safe, as far as Kumanin could see, there was a filing cabinet with records of employees, teachers and students, apparently under the special supervision of the first department.

"Follow the shots well," Kumanin praised the veteran, "you have complete order, it's nice to look at.

- How else? - Ivan Nikiforovich was clearly pleased with the praise. Who else could appreciate his work, since it was behind the scenes - only KGB officers, police and district committee instructors.

"Cadres decide everything, as Comrade Lenin said," the head of the first department handed one of the cards to Kumanin, leaving the safe half-open. - I have collected everything here according to the instructions of the district committee. First of all, Jews and those whose relatives were subjected to repression as representing an increased public danger. It is important to know their moods. Then those who abuse alcohol, are prone to theft, fartsovka, immoral behavior ...

— Do you have many Jews? Kumanin asked, solely to keep the conversation going with the handsome veteran.

- Previously, there was a lot of work, - Ivan Nikiforovich admitted, - but gradually they cleared it up. Who left, who was laid off. Now within five percent, as expected. We do not take new ones without instructions," he raised his finger.

"In general, complete order," Kumanin stated, writing off the installation data for Theophilus from the card: "Feofil Pimenovich Pimenov, born in 1948, Russian, non-partisan, higher education, lieutenant of the medical service reserve. Temporarily registered at the address: Moscow, Samarkand Boulevard, 7, apt. 114. Registered permanently: pos. Nefedovo, Serpukhov district, Moscow region, Kommunarov passage, 5. Single. The card was stamped boldly "Fired."

— Do you have any information about graduate students? Kumanin asked, closing his notebook.

"Not covered," the chief said with a sigh, "only by the list. You should be interested in the place of their main work. We can tell you something about evening parties, if necessary.

Thanking for the assistance, Kumanin went out into the street, considering a plan for further action. Deciding not to lose the "operational pace", he immediately drove his "Zhigulinka" to Samarkand Boulevard, located on the very outskirts of Moscow. Behind the rows of new buildings at the ring of the 209th bus, wastelands lushly overgrown with grass and weeds began to appear.

However, on the spot he was disappointed. The landlady of the apartment where Feofil was temporarily registered said that her lodger had already checked out for two months and left for the place of permanent registration, that is, to the village of Nefedovo, Serpukhov district.

Kumanin, in the heat of the chase, almost turned around to head south towards the Serpukhov highway. On a good road, Serpukhov could be reached in less than an hour. But he changed his mind - it was already half past five. To get on the highway, you need

to travel half the city, and then still look for Theophilus in Nefedovo itself. Kumanin did not like to spend the night in the car. Postponing the trip to Serpukhov until the morning (next Sunday), Kumanin decided to call on his father, who has a birthday today. It is possible that Stepan Agafonovich will return from his trip today.

Entering the entrance of the house, Kumanin realized that Stepan Agafonovich had not yet returned - newspapers were sticking out of the overflowing mailbox. In addition to several issues of Pravda and Krasnaya Zvezda, there was the Kommunist Armed Forces magazine and a receipt for paying for a long-distance telephone conversation with Leningrad.

The apartment was empty and dim because of the curtained windows. Kumanin turned on the light and went into the kitchen. On the kitchen table lay a note written by Stepan Agafonovich: "Dear Seryozha! Don't worry, and please don't make any attempt to find me. I'll let myself know. I hug. Father".

Sergey, having read this message, became worried. "Which means: 'please don't make any attempt to find me. Frankly, he did not intend to look for his father, but then he felt a passionate desire to do just that. Where, why and for how long did the father leave? Why doesn't he want Sergei to start looking for him? Apparently, he is afraid that his son will start looking for him, using his official position. In other words, he asks him not to involve his powerful department in his father's affairs. And if not, then there is nothing to understand at all. Similar notes were written in the novels of the 19th century by runaway wives: "Forgive me and don't look for me," or something like that, and not seventy-three-year-old veterans of the NKVD - MGB. After reading the note again, Kumanin shrugged his shoulders. Throwing newspapers and a magazine on the kitchen table, he saw a long-distance telephone bill slip out of the stack and fall to the floor. Sergei picked it up and, obeying the mood that arose after reading his father's note, looked at the Leningrad telephone number, which, judging by the date, Stepan Agafonovich called a week ago: 355-99-93. There was a desire to dial it and congratulate my father on his birthday, but I had to refuse. Since his father asked him not to look, it means that he wanted to, and there is nothing to get into his affairs. In addition, there was no certainty that the father was on this phone. You never know who can call to Leningrad. This does not mean that he went exactly there.

While watering the flowers, Sergei remembered a strange letter that he noticed lying by the phone during the last meeting with his father. The letter was also sent from Leningrad, and the sender was some Israel Lazarevich, which then surprised Kumanin. He went to the bedside table where the telephone stood and found that the letter was still in its place, next to the last telephone directory of the Moscow automatic telephone exchange, which was distributed exclusively among the disabled and veterans of the Great Patriotic War.

After hesitating for a moment, Kumanin took the letter, took out from the envelope a sheet of a student's notebook in a box, on which was written in an even and confident handwriting:

"Dear, Styopa! I understand all the questions you bombarded me with. If I were you, I would ask them even more and, perhaps, in a much sharper form. However, much of what I could tell you, I cannot and do not want to trust paper. It seems to me that it makes sense for us to meet for the second and probably the last time. If you decide to come, warn me by phone (Leningrad, of course): 355-99-93. I'll meet you. I. L."

The letter calmed Kumanin, especially "dear Styopa." Only a person of his age or older could address Stepan Agafonovich so familiarly. The fact that this man was a Jew and that Sergei had not heard anything about him meant nothing. Every Chekist carries in himself (and takes to the grave) a lot of things that neither his wife nor his children know about. Kumanin already knew this from his own experience. Before the war, during it, and immediately after it, organs were

literally crammed with Jews, so there's nothing unusual about that either. Stepan Agafonovich was always not verbose, and he never said even half a word about the service.

A kind of laziness seized Kumanin. He did not want to go home, and he decided to spend the night with his father, drive him to a gas station in the morning, and then go in search of Theophilus. He hoped that Nadia and Theophilus were somewhere together, and, having found Theophilus, he would find her too.

Oddly enough, but no one called to congratulate Stepan Agafonovich on his birthday, although, perhaps, his father warned not him alone about his departure. True, the brother from Dushanbe called again. Sergei reassured him, saying that he had definitely found out that the old man had gone to Leningrad to some old colleague. What business they have there is unknown, probably will appear soon.

After watching the news on TV, he found out that Gorbachev was still in Bonn, from there he was going to Paris, and with him - it was especially pleasant - Klimov, talking about something with Eduard Amvrosievich, in the recent past, also a KGB general. However, Kumanin knew that judging the movements of such high-ranking officials on the TV screen

at least recklessly. They can play the recording, how Gorbachev and his retinue are watching the passage of the guard of honor of the Bersaliers somewhere in Rome, and they have long been in Moscow and in an hour or two, having taken off from some unknown airfield - already in another place.

Turning off the TV, Kumanin called Nadia's parents to find out if they had found out anything about their daughter. Nikolai Kuzmich answered the phone. They didn't know anything new. Nadia never showed up or called. He went to three Moscow morgues for identification, and did not say anything to his wife. Thank God, Nadia was not among the corpses presented to him for identification. Lidia Fyodorovna is completely ill, no matter how much she has to be admitted to the hospital. A young man came, introduced himself as a researcher at the department where Nadina's dissertation was being held, and asked for a folder with the dissertation to give him, because the so-called cathedral defense was coming soon, and scientific opponents wanted to get acquainted with the work.

"I hope," Kumanin went cold, "you didn't say that I have a dissertation?"

"Why not," Nikolai Kuzmich answered ingenuously, "they said that Comrade Nadia took it to look at it, he will give it back soon.

- And they called my last name? Kumanin inquired, although he perfectly understood that if the same people who took Alyosha Lisitsyn from the boarding school are hunting for a dissertation, they will calculate him even without a surname in six seconds.

"No," said Nikolai Kuzmich, "he simply said that Nadya's comrade had taken her for a while." He got upset and left immediately.

— What does he look like? Kumanin asked. - Can you describe it?

- What did it look like? - Nikolai Kuzmich asked again, - I don't remember exactly. Thirty-five years old, blond beard.

- Long hair? Kumanin asked.

"Hair..." Nadya's father strained her memory, "I don't remember, it seems not, normal hair, like everyone else's..."

Did he not give his name?

- No. Left immediately. I saw from the balcony that he got into the car, there was someone else driving. And they left.

- What brand is the car? Did not notice?

- No. I don't remember," Nikolai Kuzmich admitted, "I didn't pay attention.

Pulling on his jacket as he went, Kumanin flew out of his father's apartment, jumped into his car and rushed along the dark streets of Moscow's new buildings to his home. Bypassing the elevator, flew up to his floor. I looked at the apartment door. Everything seemed to be in order, opened the door and turned on the light. Everything looked the same as before he left home. But there was no folder with Nadia's dissertation on the table.

Chapter 5

Kumanin's hunch about Mikhail Gorbachev's stay in Germany turned out to be correct. Both Gorbachev and Klimov flew to Moscow for the weekend, although this, of course, was not reported as Gorbachev's official visit to the FRG continued.

On Saturdays, the Secretary General liked to go to the sauna, and even the outbreak of the third world war, probably, would not have forced him to give up his usual pleasure. However, a sauna was also equipped in his bunker in case of a thermonuclear catastrophe.

Perhaps, in Germany, as Chancellor Kohl assured, there were better saunas, but nothing could replace the usual intimate atmosphere, when you can completely relax and talk with especially close comrades, without thinking that some Western intelligence agency writes all the conversations. By the way, Helmut Kohl was also invited to Moscow to take a steam bath and relax. The Chancellor refused, and they didn't beg him - the intimacy of the conversation would disappear, besides, he would bring with him a bunch of all sorts of secretaries and personal advisers. Unlike Gorbachev, Kohl could not have slipped out of the country unnoticed - it would immediately have got into the newspapers, Western, of course, which in a month and a half could be read in Moscow.

"The capital of the world, the heart of all Russia" - Moscow - in the middle of 1989, as, indeed, now, was a mysterious, little-known city, tightly isolated from the outside world. Deaf concrete fences, monster buildings stretching for hundreds of meters without entrance doors and with tightly curtained windows, entire blocks of buildings with locked entrances, steel gates and secret gates, simpler houses with police watches in the front doors. No one knew about their purpose, and skillfully spread rumors said something indistinct about secret institutions forging secret weapons for the final victory of labor over capital.

Many, apparently, would be very disappointed, and some even outraged, if they knew that such strict measures of secrecy and medieval secrecy surround buildings, behind the walls of which luxury clubs, swimming pools, saunas, golf courses, tennis courts, food and manufactured goods are deployed. special warehouses, special hairdressers, special dry cleaners, special tailoring studios, special clinics and special hospitals, special libraries and special book storages, special auto parks and even special funeral service bureaus. All this was carefully hidden from prying eyes, since it belonged to a completely different country, which had no name and was not indicated on geographical maps, for which the entire huge empire called the Soviet Union, which was considered a superpower, worked. In fact, the latter was just a colony of that small mysterious country that fenced itself off from the superpower with concrete fences with gates, which were constantly on duty by armed guards, who were also not allowed to enter the fence. In this country, there were no kilometer-long queues for items of the first

necessary, there was no shortage of goods and services, even in a nightmare there were no dreams of communal apartments, filthy stairwells, unlit and unpaved streets, dirty crowds at railway stations, drunken obscenities of vodka lines, the stench of gateways, children dying from a lack of medicines and doctors, and old men. Neither anti-alcohol campaigns, nor campaigns against unearned incomes, nor laws on parasites, money changers, black marketers, degenerates, renegades and anti-Soviet people have reached this country, because, to put it bluntly, this whole country consisted of nothing but parasites, money changers, black marketeers, degenerates, renegades and anti-Soviet, acting on a scale that no one outside of it dreamed of. It had its own jurisdiction, its own moral code, its own way of life (which could be high, medium and low, but even the lowest one was an order of magnitude superior to the highest level on the other side of the blank wall), its own habits and even its own currency. Although they preferred here not invented bonds and certificates, but full-fledged dollars and Deutschmarks, for the mere possession of which, on the other side of the wall, they were thrown into prison.

This small state, for which millions of slaves actually worked for free for a diploma or a brass medal, was created by the genius of Lenin and Stalin, who destroyed about a hundred million people who did not fit into their social theories in the name of this great goal. It took its final form and codification in the Brezhnev era. It was very difficult to become a citizen of this "country", if you did not receive such a right by inheritance. Neither Gorbachev nor Klimov had a hereditary right to do this - both were "thrown" over a concrete fence by a combination of circumstances. Something went wrong in the intricacies of intrigue at the court of the previous four general secretaries, three of whom were escorted to the next world.

Unfortunately, the luxurious isolation of this small country, which slanderers - envious people in the USSR and abroad - dubbed the "Soviet Through the Looking-Glass" or "Country Nomenclature", in recent years has become more and more reminiscent of the isolation of a besieged fortress. Three hundred million people, deprived of elementary human rights, thrice robbed and deceived, the population of the last slave-owning empire in the world pressed in from below; from above no less powerful pressure was exerted by a potential enemy — the rest of the world, which had gone far ahead of this homespun kingdom, which the leader of the world revolution was trying to transform into a "depot" of this revolution. The inhabitants of the "Nomenclaturia" have long been convinced that the path indicated by Lenin to build the first slave-owning state in modern history on a bloody mixture of permanent terror and economic depravity led to a dead end, where they were all destined to die, and therefore they looked with hope at the youngest of all the general secretaries, who firmly said: "I will save the country", meaning, of course, the country "Nomenklatura". The rest of the country has long been forgotten, and few people were interested in it, especially after the Chernobyl apocalypse.

Steamed and complacent, after a sauna and a session of special massage, Gorbachev and Klimov, wrapped in terry bathrobes, reclined like ancient Roman patricians in deep armchairs, savoring the greenish-fiery Franco-German liqueur Westfalia. And although their taste was greatly spoiled by the Stavropol past, where the most refined drink was considered imported from the Caucasus "chacha", life in the "Through the Looking Glass" taught them a lot, including understanding the complex bouquets of foreign and domestic collection wines and liqueurs.

"When the late Yuri Vladimirovich," Mikhail Gorbachev recalled dreamily, "at the station in Mineralnye Vody introduced me to Leonid Ilyich, he looked at me from under his shaggy eyebrows and said: 'You will save the country.' 'You are confusing, Mikhail Sergeevich,'" objected Klimov. - He did not say, but asked "Will you save the country?", To which Yuri Vladimirovich replied: "He will save the country." And you, as far as I know, did not say a word then, and therefore should not be responsible for anything.

"No, no," Gorbachev laughed. "It wasn't quite right. It's not even like that at all. But be that as it may, it seemed to me that as soon as I started, everything would take shape, and the process would go on. But everything turned out to be much more complicated. One had only to deepen, and you understand ... - the Secretary General sighed and took a sip of liquor.

- When I was at school, - said Klimov, - in the class, it seems, the fifth or sixth, I came across Boris Zhitkov's sea stories. There was such a pre-war writer. He has one wonderful story. I forgot its name, but the essence is this: a ship in the ocean, in its hold, under a heavy and explosive cargo, a fire started due to spontaneous combustion of smuggled saltpeter. The source of the fire could not be reached, but the temperature reading in the hold clearly told the captain and another officer, who knew about the fire, approximately how much time they had left before the ship took off. And on board, in addition to cargo, there were about two hundred passengers: women, children, old people and other helpless people. The ship was doomed, but the captain decided to save the passengers. First of all, it was necessary to prevent panic. Therefore, information about the fire in the hold was kept secret for a long time, and one passenger who accidentally sniffed about it had to be thrown overboard.

Recently, I very often feel like a member of the crew of that very ship. A terrible fire is raging in the holds, it cannot be extinguished, and we know, dear Mikhail Sergeevich, that soon our majestic white liner called the Soviet Union will fly into the air, crumble into pieces that will quickly or slowly, but surely sink. God forbid to keep Russia afloat and not let it fall apart after the USSR...

"Yes, yes," Mikhail Sergeevich perked up, "this is what lays the foundation for everything. You state everything correctly, Viktor Ivanovich, because if we lose time, it will be, you know, fraught. Once the process has begun, it should be accelerated, deepened, you understand. On the other hand, by December we will convene the second congress of people's deputies and begin to gradually shape the process that you have so vividly described. Unfortunately, I didn't read much. Busy, you know, was always: Komsomol work, party studies, then university. I was a Komsomol organizer there together with Lukyanov. So you think we can save the passengers before our ship breaks up?

"If there were two hundred people, like on that steamer," the general said thoughtfully, looking at the light of the emerald overflows of a liquor glass, "then everyone could be saved. But since we have three hundred million of them, we will only have to save first-class passengers, like on the Titanic. The rest, if they swim, they will swim, if not, then everlasting memory.

Gorbachev laughed:

- I really like the way you present the most serious things, with a sense of, I would say, good humor. When Raisa Maksimovna and I were vacationing in Italy in 1972 at the villa of the Central Committee of the CPSU, I was still, one might say, a small person, and for two of us we were entitled to only fifteen thousand dollars a month. So you can't even imagine what the attitude was towards us, but I'm not talking about that. We were placed in a room where it was completely impossible to get out in case of a fire, while in the higher class rooms there are measures for quick evacuation in case of any emergency: floods, earthquakes and even eruptions, although there was not a single volcano nearby. In the coming cataclysm, it is very important for us to preserve the backbone of our Party, its most healthy and creative forces, so to speak. I mean, keep the leadership of the country. It is in this direction that we need to work. To use your analogy, there would not be enough room in the boats for even half of the passengers who are now in first-class cabins. Many will have to be sacrificed, especially comrades in Eastern Europe and some of ours, who do not understand the seriousness of the moment and are so rooted, you know, in symbolism and terminology that they are ready to die in the name of various not * serious things and

kill everyone else. Of course, we will carry out the necessary work with the comrades, but if ... Do you understand?

- Yes, - Klimov nodded his head, - and if the Soviet Union is doomed, measures must be taken so that they do not regret it very much. Still, the "Evil Empire", as President Reagan put it. We have already launched a powerful campaign to discredit Stalin - the so-called second wave. For now, within the framework of your thesis on the "deformation of socialism", we will gradually move on to Ilyich, since there is hardly a place for the mausoleum in the boat - a very bulky structure.

Gorbachev sighed.

- Vladimir Ilyich, of course, simplified many questions and understood them not quite correctly, as time showed. But as the creator of a new type of party, as a party organizer and leader, who knew how to save the party in any conditions from the pressure of external forces and from an internal split, mind you, without shooting anyone. I mean the backbone of the party, of course. In this respect, despite his well-known shortcomings, he will always be for me an ideal leader, an ideal party leader.

"Yes," Klimov agreed, "genius can only be imitated. I am afraid that we will not be able to rise to the level of Ilyich, not only in solving internal Party issues. We will have to carry out many events with a completely opposite sign, albeit with similar methods.

- What do you have in mind? Gorbachev asked with some anxiety in his voice.

"Vladimir Ilyich directed all the energy of his mighty mind," explained Klimov, "to the destruction of the Russian Empire. By and large, he dreamed of transforming the whole world, as well as Russia, at his own discretion. Our goals are much more modest. We do not need to destroy anything, because everything dies by itself. It is only necessary to control this process to the best of our ability. Control is not the same as slowing down. Sometimes, in order to control the process, on the contrary, it is necessary to speed it up.

"Yes, yes," Gorbachev nodded approvingly, "this is very good. Restructuring and acceleration, you can even say: "Acceleration-90", referring to the coming year. Our people love short and clear slogans. Even if the slogans are not entirely clear, it is important that they be concise.

"Of course," agreed Klimov, "brevity is the sister of talent." Our friends," the general made a meaningful pause, "think that after the April events in Tbilisi, such events should be held on an even larger scale, but exclusively on the periphery, using traditional racial, religious and, of course, political antagonism. This will allow Russia to separate relatively painlessly from the republics with minimal chances of a large-scale massacre. Until then, there is a lot of work to be done. The main thing, I think, is that we have a maximum of a year or two at our disposal in order to have time to take all our explosive cargo out of Europe. I mean the army: the Western Group of Forces, the Southern Group, and so on. The events that will break out in the countries of the Warsaw Pact may detonate an explosion in the army. If she's at home, there's much less chance of an explosion.

"I completely agree with you," the Secretary General noted, "but so that no one doubts our sincere desire to follow the path of democratic reforms, all our activities should be quite effective steps in this direction.

"They are already quite effective, they just seemed to be masked by such events as the Chernobyl disaster and the death of two newest submarines. Especially the last one

the case of the boat, which, after it sank, became known as "Komsomolets". Very symbolic, but if my opinion was asked, I would suggest calling it "Soviet Union". - Klimov continue to savor the liquor.

"You're all joking," the secretary general sighed again, "but they reported to me that the boat is very good, even no one in the world had an analogue: a titanium hull and so on ...

"And nuclear torpedoes," Klimov added. "When sea water corrodes them, we got another Chernobyl. Fortunately, the Soviet Union will probably no longer exist, and all catastrophes can be attributed to the costs of the communist totalitarian system. By the way, have you already been informed about the explosion near Ufa? Doesn't he tell you anything?

"Let's not talk about it," Gorbachev visibly grew gloomy. - It's, you know, like "make a fool pray to God." Sometimes even hands fall from the general, you know, stupidity. You mentioned that in a couple of years everything can be blamed on the CPSU. This, in my opinion, is not quite the right approach. I told you that right now it is necessary to create a multi-party system in the country in order to share responsibility for everything that has been and will be. But this case has been so delayed that it is clearly not in time. The West would like it too. How much they are already shouting about our one-party system. Most of all they love the liberal democrats there. I told you, I remember, that you need to create your own liberal-democratic party, appointing reliable comrades from your department and the Central Committee to its leadership, find premises for them, organize funding and everything that is needed for the comrades to work normally ...

"For this," Klimov objected, "it is first necessary to abolish Article 6 of the Constitution on the role of the CPSU as the only political force in the country. And this is your task, not mine. Secondly, I proposed a candidate as the head of this party, but for some reason you did not like him.

- Do you consider this subject a liberal democrat? Gorbachev was surprised. - Yes, this, excuse me, is a typical Trotskyist from among the most rabid. Yes, not a single self-respecting Western politician will sit at the same table with him, believe me.

"No need," Klimov shrugged. "He and his party are not meant for that at all. They are for internal use. Let the insolent people see what liberal democracy is, and then everyone will only pray that the communists return to power. I mean, I didn't express myself correctly. It should have been said that the communists would never lose power, since all we are planning is to leave our people everywhere, both in the center and in the localities, especially in the localities. And various liberal democrats and others who appear on the ruins of the Union will only have the right to express their opinion on this issue, which will not seriously interest anyone. This is the main task of what we have called perestroika. Preservation of power and all the funds that they owned, even increasing them, but all this in a different form. Without ideology, which, alas, has already died. It must be discarded. The power of money, the power of property is much stronger than the power based on our old slogans.

"If Lenin could hear you now," Gorbachev said bitterly, "what would he say?

"He would completely agree with me," Klimov smiled. "Remember how often he himself changed slogans, sometimes three times a day. Either "All power to the Soviets", then "Down with the Soviets". The main quality that made Lenin great was his instant orientation in the political situation of the day. Did you read his secret notes when the party was preparing to go underground again in 1919? In fact, Ilyich drew up for all of us a methodology for today's actions. The difference is only in the details. Lenin himself never

stuck to the ideology. The main thing is organization, he taught. It was the model of a leader. Even backed into a corner, he saw ways to save not only himself, but the organization with all its funds and institutions. Remember, when he brought his team to power in 1917, he was in the fist of the Germans. The inheritance that the German occupation command allocated to him and which we usually call the "young Republic of Soviets" was in fact a German semi-protectorate-semi-colony. Then the German troops were already entering Tbilisi, but what did Ilyich do? He strengthened the cadres and made plans for the world revolution. Here Germany collapsed, and the situation changed radically. Now our party is going through difficult times. The country is crumbling as it did in 1918. But who can guarantee that something won't happen to the United States soon? Nobody. This country has now swung at world hegemony, and such ambitions are fraught with all sorts of surprises. The balance of the world system, like two counterweights, was maintained throughout the post-war period by the USA and the USSR. Now the USSR has broken, fallen and will soon crumble. And what will happen to the second counterweight? If the laws of physics apply in geopolitics, then the same thing will happen. And as soon as something happens to them, we will discard all the nonsense associated with the "new thinking" and so on, and thanks to the personnel left in the right places, we will create a regime, say, of a national dictatorship and restore the dominant position in the world. Do you catch my thought, Mikhail Sergeevich?

"By your mouth," Gorbachev sighed for the third time (Klimov counted the General Secretary's sighs). - In one thing you are right: you need to save the organization, whatever it is called, keeping your people and mine in it, although the name, of course, matters. How do you like, for example, the "Party of Democratic Socialism"?

"I don't like it at all," Klimov admitted. "Your old thinking is still taking over. If it is impossible to do without a signboard, then it should not contain any allusions to either socialism or democracy, because both of these concepts have already been sufficiently compromised. It's just that not everyone fully understands this. The sign should be completely neutral, although it can also be loud, like: "World Bank Imperial" or "All-Russian Investment Fund" and even, if it suits you, just "Gorbachev Fund". I will work in it as a modest accountant, and I will have an office, for example, in Amsterdam. But no one but us should know about it. Remember the immortal Parvus. His modest "Export-Import Office" in Stockholm eventually destroyed the Russian Empire and blew Nicholas II off the throne like a feather. You know that if it were not for Parvus, no one would remember Lenin now. He would have quietly rested in some abandoned Jewish cemetery near Zurich ...

"By the way, about Nicholas II," Gorbachev recalled. "How is my assignment regarding his remains?" Is there any work in this direction? Believe me, Viktor Ivanovich, this is very important, because such things give rise to a lot.

"At first, this task seemed very simple to me," Klimov confessed, "and, Mikhail Sergeevich, I confess to you, I did not take it with due seriousness. Then, as you remember, I asked you to look at the necessary documents in the "Special Folder" of the Politburo. But our trips around the world and the difficult work that we are now doing with our Western friends have pushed your instruction into the background from among the immediate problems. But not far. The problem is being dealt with. Did you manage to find anything in the "Special Folder"?

"Imagine, no," Gorbachev replied. - I instructed Boldin to pick up the necessary documents for me. He reported that he had found nothing, except for Yurovsky's suicide letter, in which he confesses that he did not kill the tsar.

— Is that how? - Klimov was surprised, - that means the kings.

"You don't understand," Gorbachev interrupted the general. "He confesses that he did not personally kill the king, as is commonly believed. For many years there was a debate between Yurovsky and a certain Medvedev, which of them personally put a bullet in the head of Nicholas II. The case once even reached the Control Commission of the Central Committee, until Comrade Stalin ordered these discussions to be stopped, since he considered it insignificant any personal participation of ordinary performers in national cause of the greatest historical significance; But the squabble, as you probably know, has continued almost to the present day, who killed the tsar: Yurovsky or Medvedev? Thus, from Yurovsky's letter, addressed personally to Comrade Stalin from the Kremlin hospital, it is clear that neither Yurovsky nor Medvedev not only killed the tsar, but were not even present at the execution. How do you like it?"

"I like it very much," Klimov admitted. So who then carried out the sentence?"

"According to Yurovsky, some special representative who arrived for this purpose from Moscow on the personal orders of Lenin and Sverdlov," Gorbachev spread his hands. - Go ahead and figure it out. He was accompanied by a team, among which no one spoke or understood Russian. The commissioner himself spoke only German. They carried out the sentence. Then they loaded the corpses onto a truck and took them somewhere. Where exactly? Yurovsky says he did not know and does not know. Here are some interesting things. The letter stated that he, Medvedev and Nikulin were so drunk that they could not really remember the details of that night. He tried to accompany the commissioner on horseback, but fell off his horse and was badly hurt. Of course, as I understood from this letter, it was mainly not about the tsar, but about the loss of some extremely important documents that disappeared that night in Yekaterinburg. There was a fear that Yurovsky or one of his people sent these documents abroad to Parvus, whom you mentioned. Yurovsky, on the other hand, justifies himself that the commissioner, who shot the royal family, took these documents with him.

"And does he give the name of this commissioner?" Klimov asked.

"It's also interesting," Gorbachev replied. - Judging by the content of the letter, the surname was known to both Yurovsky and Stalin, but it is not mentioned in it. It is only indicated that this man was a German. Yurovsky lived in Germany for a long time and knew the Germans well. He assures that it was a typical German, judging by the pronunciation. And in bearing - a former officer of the Kaiser's army, of which there were quite a few in the then Leninist environment.

— And what about Yurovsky's well-known report, which is quoted by all historians here and abroad? Klimov asked.

"Yurovsky confesses in this letter," Gorbachev continued, "that much later, in the year, he doesn't remember exactly, on the 21st or 22nd, he, having already become the head of the Gokhran, was once either summoned to Lenin, or I met him by chance somewhere in the Kremlin. And Lenin allegedly asked him if he shot Nikolai and his family. According to Yurovsky, he wanted to explain to Ilyich how it happened, but he said: "You, you shot, my friend. Write me a report on this, and that everything be plausible. Yurovsky wrote the report for a whole week, and then handed it over personally to Lenin. But Ilyich was at that moment busy with something, nodded only with his head, and did not react to it in any other way.

— Could you give me a copy of this letter from Yurovsky? Klimov asked.

- No, what are you! I can, of course, - even Gorbachev was indignant - this is the document of the "Special Folder". To transfer it to any department, a decision of the Politburo is required, I did not even have the right to retell it to you without the consent of the comrades from the Politburo. I hope that you will not extradite me out of old friendship.

"So," Klimov smiled, "I already have the right to hold you accountable for

oral disclosure of a document of special national importance.

"Yes," Gorbachev smiled in response, "but verbally and without signs of treason. You know, I also graduated from the law faculty of Moscow State University, I know my rights and obligations. The General Secretary laughed. - That's all that Boldin managed to find in the archive.

- Are you sure that Boldin is so diligently fulfilling your instructions? Klimov inquired.

"I'm sure, I'm not sure," the Secretary General spread his hands. There are things that are almost impossible to control. Shouldn't I go and dig into the archive myself? Moreover, they installed computer protection there, and in order to understand all the subtleties, one must graduate from at least two more universities: archival and radio electronic. When I need to dig up something really very important, I send Alexander Nikolaevich Yakovlev there. He loses a lot of time there, but sometimes he finds something. Take, for example, the secret protocols to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, which we are asked to make public as evidence of new thinking. I first asked Gromyko himself. He answered me without batting an eye: "There were no protocols. All this is an invention of the Western anti-Soviet." And he added: "Believe me, Mikhail Sergeyevich, if there were such protocols, someone, and I would already know about them. There were no protocols." I did not believe it and instructed Boldin to look for them in the "Special Folder". He reported to me three times that there was nothing and could not be. Then I sent Yakovlev. Alexander Yakovlevich is a very experienced person of the Suslov temper. What do you think? He spent a whole month there, and the light in the archive was turned off, and the battery burst once, everything was flooded, and they wanted to close the room for a month for repairs. Another would have simply spat and abandoned the search, but he was stubborn and - what do you think? - I found all the secret protocols, they were also accompanied by a map of the division of spheres of influence between the USSR and Germany, signed by Stalin and Ribbentrop. Moreover, looking for these secret protocols, Comrade Yakovlev found a Politburo resolution on the execution of Polish officers in the Katyn forest. It has all the signatures, from Stalin and Beria to Kalinin and Voroshilov. These documents are now in my possession, and we will set them in motion when we see fit. How do you like it all?

"Funny," commented Klimov, finishing his liquor and refilling his glass with emerald fire.

- And what do you think? Gorbachev continued. - Before Comrade Yakovlev had time to work in this way in the archive for two weeks, your boss, Kryuchkov, comes to me, accompanied by his former boss Chebrikov and in a confidential tone, so to speak, informs me that they have received data, you will never guess, which.

"That Yakovlev is a Jew," suggested Klimov.

- It's cooler, - Gorbachev laughed, - that he is a career agent of the CIA, recruited while still studying at Columbia University. That it is necessary to release him from all his posts without too much noise, and then eliminate him with the help of an artificial heart attack, which, as far as I remember, is called "Eternal Bliss Special Equipment" in your system. It seems so?

- No, - the general smiled in response, - "Eternal Peace", not "Eternal Bliss". "Eternal Bliss" is the connection to a special distributor of the highest category.

- What nonsense! Gorbachev reacted irritably. - So people who have never been to this distributor can argue, but have heard enough of various nonsense rumors. Have you noticed that in our dispenser in the midst of summer there are neither fresh raspberries nor ...

"No canned lobsters," Klimov added. "After Parisian or Madrid stores, not to mention Brussels ones, it's disgusting to enter our distributor, everything has degraded so much. However, we digress, Mikhail Sergeevich. This means that Kryuchkov and Chebrikov presented you with dirt on Yakovlev and demanded his elimination, both political and physical. Did I understand you correctly?"

"No," Gorbachev objected softly. They didn't demand anything. You know, I really don't like being asked for anything. I was still the first secretary of the regional committee when Eduard Amvrosievich, who was then the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Georgia, decided to demand the extradition of some settlers from Georgia who had settled in the Stavropol Territory. You know well how things ended. And both of them know very well that tomorrow I will convene the Plenum, and they will have to stand in the veterans' queue at GUM to get a dozen ready-made cutlets. Therefore, they did not demand anything, but simply lied, if I may say so.

"And do you think," Klimov asked, "this was a reaction to the searches that Yakovlev carried out in the Special Folder?"

"I don't think, I know," Gorbachev answered. - As proof that Alexander Nikolayevich is a CIA agent, Kryuchkov reported on his search in the Politburo archive for documents that could significantly undermine the prestige of the USSR and the party not only in the world, but also in the eyes of its own population. He asked me to stop his activities.

- And what did you answer? - Klimov clearly liked the story of the misadventures of his immediate superior.

"You know," the secretary general admitted, "I don't want to particularly aggravate relations with him yet. Moreover, with a certain development of events, Kryuchkov is a candidate for relegation, and right from his office. I remember that we rather carefully selected a candidate from among your colleagues, whom we could sacrifice, if necessary, in order to "give the people a hearty chew on a bone," as the late Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev liked to say. In the meantime, let Kryuchkov sit in his place. I thanked my comrades for their vigilance and promised to look into everything. And what do you think? When Alexander Nikolaevich came to the archive the next day, he was informed that the electric motor that opened the steel shutters of the shelves with archival files had burned down. Do you know this system? A code is dialed that drives an electric motor, which in turn sets steel doors in motion, opening the filing cabinets. Alexander Nikolayevich is a very restrained, but tough person by nature. He never raises his voice, but he can send the entire leadership of some research institute to the Gulag for shortcomings in visual agitation of the historical role of the party in achieving all our victories. What he, between us, did in the Stalinist era of a monstrous deformation of socialism. So, Comrade Yakovlev summoned the leadership of the archive and asked if they understood their responsibility, sabotaging the instructions of a member of the Politburo. It was evident from their faces that they understood responsibility, but were ready to endure, so as not to be exposed to even greater responsibility to their direct superiors from the Lubyanka.

"Interesting," the general chuckled. "And that was the end of it?"

"Practically, yes," Gorbachev sighed. - Comrade Yakovlev is very busy in his area of work to waste so much time in the archive. Moreover, he has found everything we need now. Why not send him back to the archive, to look for the burial place of the last king? Firstly, he may not understand why this is necessary and what it lays the foundation for. If I go looking for it myself, then everyone will be alarmed, there will be a rumor that Gorbachev decided to restore the monarchy. Thanks to Boldin for at least finding something. I know, for example, that even Joseph Vissarionovich was cut off from the archive. He was given only the information he needed.

were around him. And if they could not find them, then they fabricated them without a twinge of conscience. Remember, at the end of 1952, Comrade Stalin was so tired of all this that he decided to completely renew the party apparatus by physically liquidating the old one, starting with the members of the Politburo ...

"Yes," agreed Klimov. "I remember it very well, but I remember even better how the whole affair ended. I mean the events that took place on the night of February 27-28, 1953. This should never be forgotten, because this may well happen again. 1st class passengers, who realize that they are going to be abandoned on a dying ship, can break into the captain's cabin and kill him out of hatred, and simply from despair.

"Yes," the General Secretary nodded his head. I often think about this topic myself. Rather, even on the topic of how this could happen then, at the end of February 1953. Was Iosif Vissarionovich really so seized with megalomania that he did not notice, as they say, a "childish checkmate" in two moves? I'll probably never fully understand how it all happened.

Gorbachev stood up and, with the air of a hospitable host, poured wine from a long bottle into glasses, on the label of which a white stork was rapidly diving somewhere down, clutching a juicy bunch of grapes in its beak.

"Try it," General Secretary suggested to Klimov, "after liquor, this wine creates a stunning bouquet and refreshes. We must admit, as a self-criticism, that we were completely unable to understand such questions. They drank as they had to, not realizing that this process could also be a pleasure. - The General Secretary took a sip, chewed his lips with the air of a real taster and turned to Klimov. - You mentioned the events of February 1953, considering that they could happen again? Did I understand you correctly?

"If they happen again," Klimov said thoughtfully, continuing to sip liquor (he did not like grape wines), "then, apparently, as usual, in the form of a farce. Although you have to be extremely careful. It is possible that they can be provoked into some stupidity at the last stage of the operation. Still, you must agree that Kryuchkov is neither Beria nor Andropov. Even cornered, he doesn't seem very dangerous to me. Perhaps growling like a mouse. This is where the matter ends.

- How is the mouse? Gorbachev was surprised. Can a mouse growl?

"Like a mouse," Klimov remarked without a shadow of a smile. - Do not be surprised. The snarling mouse makes a strong impression on many precisely because it is a mouse. It can also slip into places where no tiger can reach without the support of at least two panzer divisions. But even so, she remains just a mouse that can be easily swatted. In 1953, the situation was completely different. Iosif Vissarionovich was already too old, complacent and did not notice much. In addition, he had some weaknesses and prejudices that were known to everyone in his inner circle, which they are very clever, we must give them their due, and took advantage. They crept up to the leader under the cover of a smoke screen of anti-Semitism, and when they emerged from it, Iosif Vissarionovich did not have time to lift a finger.

"Are you saying," Gorbachev did not understand, "that Comrade Stalin was brought to a stroke by the irresponsible behavior of persons from the highest party echelon?

"Yes," Klimov sighed, "from two shots at close range, not only a stroke can happen, but something even worse ...

— What are you talking about? Gorbachev interrupted the general. - What shots? I heard that

they used a simple...

- Who cares? Klimov was surprised. - What difference does it make in what way a person is sent to the next world? You heard so, I know otherwise. It's not essential. I just don't believe that any of them could have guessed what they reported to you about. The smartest thing they could come up with then was the "smoke screen" of anti-Semitism, which I mentioned, which, you know, is as old as the world. If the goal is the collapse of the state, there is simply nothing better to come up with.

"But you yourself suggested," Gorbachev objected, "to apply this "veil" even today, assuring that it will be even more effective than Chernobyl. Aren't you afraid that now, under the cover of this "veil", processes may occur that will be difficult for us to control?"

"An old proven remedy is always more reliable than anything new and not yet tested," Klimov replied gloomily. As long as everything is under control. Of course, it could be abandoned if you knew that some kind of catastrophe would happen. "We will accomplish everything that is planned by the Party," he quoted with visible pleasure. "Frankly, I will tell you, Mikhail Sergeyevich, it is still more reliable to act under the veil of anti-Semitism than in the glow of Chernobyl. Do you know, by the way, how many people received irradiation of the 1st and 2nd degree during the "fall of the Wormwood star", as predicted in the Bible?"

"Something was reported to me," the Secretary General muttered displeasedly. - What does it matter now?

"About five hundred thousand people," Klimov continued. - Three times more than in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. We were subjected, one might say, to a massive nuclear strike and practically did not notice it. Isn't it a great country?"

Gorbachev was silent.

- Firefighters and conscripts in the same tunics, - without waiting for an answer from the General Secretary, the general continued in the calm voice of an announcer reading a message from the newspapers, - they tried to pour water from hoses into a radioactive glow, and this in the presence of a dozen academicians. Doctors believe that half of these people will not live even ten years, and the rest will forever remain disabled. Hundreds of thousands of children who have fallen into the zone of infection, and this, as you know, is a good third of the European territory of the Union, are also doomed either to death or to lifelong disability ...

Why are you telling me all this? Gorbachev asked with some irritation in his voice. "I know all this. I want to assure you that I know even more than You.

The Secretary General's voice sounded muffled:

"On a foundation rotten to the ground, where millions of corpses have been thrown and an ocean of blood has been pumped in, it is impossible to build anything. Everything that they tried to erect almost immediately cracked, collapsed and crumbled. This also applies to high technology. On such a foundation, they became doubly dangerous and only contributed to the rapid destruction of the entire structure. Soldiers, in the presence of academicians, pour water over a radioactive glow, officers on a submarine have no idea that they have an automatic release system for life-saving equipment, and die in icy water. All this is well known to me. But, thank God, we managed to call many rescuers under different flags to the place of the death of our socialist liner. And therefore, I hope that a global catastrophe with new millions of victims will be avoided. The main thing in domestic politics is to create a core of comrades with a new way of thinking, who would correctly understand everything

subtleties and worked precisely in line with salvation. Still, Lenin and Stalin were absolutely right when they said that cadres decide everything. Here I looked after some young comrades from the Central Committee and regional committees of the party and the Komsomol, on whom I place great hopes. It seems to me that they understand everything, or at least they will understand when it is explained to them. When you take a person from the very bottom and lead with you, as, say, the late Yuri Vladimirovich led me, and I led Lukyanova, then there is no doubt in the reliability and sincerity of your comrades. How do you think?

"Yes," agreed Klimov. - Exactly such hopes, I remember, Stalin pinned on Kirov, picking him up in some kind of party outhouse and dragging him all the way to the Politburo. Do you know who our legendary Sergei Mironich turned out to be in the end? Stalin himself admitted that after this incident he would never trust anyone again. And rightly so, I tell you. In order not to fall into the same position, I heartily advise you not to idealize anyone, especially Lukyanov.

- Are there any signals? - the general secretary was wary.

Klimov laughed.

"It would be a shame," Gorbachev said with sadness in his voice. - We are with him, you know, from the university yet ... I was the secretary of the Komsomol organization, and Anatoly Ivanovich was a member of the bureau. Of course, all this is fraught, but on the other hand, such is life, as the French say. Well, I think we'll sort it out here inside somehow. It is more important for us now to prove to the West the irreversibility of, so to speak, glasnost, perestroika and the transition to universal values, in a word, new thinking. You know the West and its public opinion as well as I do. As soon as we replace the first secretaries - I mean the name itself, of course - with presidents, speakers ...

"And even emirs," Klimov laughed.

- Quite right, - the secretary general agreed joyfully, - it is very easy to work with you, Viktor Ivanovich, because you understand everything perfectly. So, as soon as we replace the names of the positions of responsible persons, they will already be satisfied there. They there, in Europe, and even more so in the USA, attach too much importance to terms and symbols. The Supreme Council is bad, but the parliament is good, let the same people and rules remain there. The regional committee of the CPSU is very bad, but, say, the administration of the governor, who will become the former secretary of the regional committee, is good. The main thing is not even what they think, but the fact that they agree to pay for all this, and a lot! Let's replace the "hammer and sickle", since they irritate them so much, with something else and we will get a billion dollar loan for this. Is it bad?

"That's wonderful," Klimov confirmed. "I understand everything perfectly and even now I'm ready to change all these sickles and hammers for a double-headed eagle or an Orthodox cross, if only we could get out of the burning hold without any special losses.

- And therefore, - continued Gorbachev, who seized the initiative in the conversation, - now there is nothing more important than purely symbolic gestures, like the return of Andrei Dmitrievich Sakharov from exile and the like. Then we will gradually approach the abolition of Article 6 of the Constitution, and soon we will simply dissolve, as if we never existed, while everything will remain in its place. Do you catch my thought, comrade Klimov?

Dropping into his mouth a juicy cherry, which was supposed to soften the fire of the Westphalia, the general silently nodded.

"In this regard," the General Secretary said after a short pause, "it seems to me expedient to resolve as quickly as possible several, as I have already noted, purely symbolic problems, which, nevertheless, are given much more importance in the West than they are in

I think they deserve it. But they know better, as they say. They have a longer neck.

Gorbachev let out a short laugh and continued:

- Among these problems, the problem of the burial of the former king is right at the nail. As if not Lenin, but you and I, Viktor Ivanovich, shot him. This is not at all my whim, as you might think, and is dictated not at all by the desire to see the Queen of England or someone else from the crowned persons, but by the feeling that this event will lay the foundation for a complete understanding by the West of the irreversibility of the processes taking place in our country. If inside the country different "smoke screens" are needed there, as you put it, then the West needs such gestures. The state funeral of the remains of the former tsar and members of his family, of course, with all honors, with the involvement of the public and religious figures, will cause such a resonance in the world that everyone will believe that there is no deceit or trick in the perestroika we have conceived. And then, as my press secretary Grachev says, they "try on the tooth" every step of ours, they are afraid, the "Evil Empire" has firmly settled in them. They see that we are dying, but still they do not believe, they are afraid. And the burial ritual, and even with military honors, an orchestra, wreaths and speeches ... this, you know, will stir up the whole world.

- And where will we bury the king? Klimov smiled. — In the Kremlin wall? And all the Politburo on the podium of the Mausoleum"

"We'll find a place to bury him," the general secretary interrupted Klimov. - You all hit on some particulars and want to reduce the matter to a joke. And I'm talking quite seriously and I want you to take this issue in the same way, which I don't notice yet. I have already explained to you how important this is. If you start this process and deepen it, then a solution will be formed to very complex problems in many areas. Do not forget that in the West, Tsar Nicholas and his family are considered almost holy martyrs. I told you that I managed to find Boldin in the "Special Folder", and then, as always, you diverted the conversation somewhere, but you do it very cleverly. And I, I remember, asked you what you managed to find out on this issue?

- I confess, very little, - answered Klimov. - Firstly, there was absolutely no time to deal with this issue personally. But I gave the task to one very capable, from my point of view, officer of our 5th Directorate. He has a historical education, for a long time controlled monarchical manifestations in Soviet society, then he was one of those who, on the contrary, revived public interest in this issue and at the same time put up the very "smoke screen" that was discussed. He is familiar with the problems and, given his energy, I would even say, persistence, he will surely discover something, unless, of course ...

- Just in case? Gorbachev asked.

- If the king and his family were buried somewhere at all. I'm already getting started on this. doubt.

- What do you have in mind? - the general secretary did not understand.

- The fact that none of those who for years were considered involved in the execution of the royal family had no idea where she was buried. All this speaks in favor of Yurovsky's letter, which Boldin, on your instructions, found in the archives. I also made some references. When Lenin arrived in Petrograd from exile in April 1917 (remember the whole "sealed wagon" story), he was accompanied by at least a dozen Kaiser officers who were supposed to ensure the future coup. Among them was a certain Captain Eugen Fox, who spoke excellent Russian, he had previously served in the so-called bureau of Colonel Nikolai.

- Who is it? Gorbachev asked, listening to Klimov, his mouth slightly open.

- Nicholas? Klimov asked. - This is the then head of German military intelligence, one might say, the progenitor of the future Abwehr, Admiral Canaris. A very capable scout, he personally knew Comrade Dzerzhinsky, supervised Parvus and Uritsky and many others. So, this same Captain Fox was one of those intelligence officers who were engaged in the eastern direction. Before the war, he lived for three years in St. Petersburg, and for a year he worked as some kind of petty official in the famous Singer company, which produces sewing machines. What he did during the war, no one knows, but there is information about his fairly frequent trips to Copenhagen and Stockholm, where he met with Parvus. Fox was one of the organizers of Lenin's journey through Germany from Switzerland to Russia and, as I have already said, together with Ilyich, arrived in revolutionary Petrograd in April 1917. The history of those days is very dark, but it can still be assumed that it was Captain Fox who brought the necessary orders to Colonel von Ruppert to organize military detachments from among German and Austro-Hungarian prisoners of war to provide military support for the Bolshevik armed uprising. Then Captain Fox went with the first Soviet government to Moscow and took part in the organization of the organs of the Cheka, that is, he was actually one of the founding fathers of our department.

I see that this surprises you, but, sadly, the fact remains that after the signing of the Brest Treaty, Lenin and the Republic of Soviets proclaimed by him were puppets of Kaiser Germany. And they understood it very well. Captain Fox, by the way, is a most staunch monarchist who considered Kaiser's Germany a model state with an optimal balance of power and democracy, a vivid example of democratic authoritarianism. He treated the Bolsheviks, to put it mildly, without much enthusiasm. However, they provided his homeland, Germany, with such opportunities, especially from the point of view of a historical perspective, that, judging by the fragmentary data that we have, on the one hand, he did everything so that, God forbid, nothing happened to the Bolshevik regime, on the other hand, he was ready to liquidate this regime at any moment if an appropriate order was received from Berlin.

— How so? Gorbachev did not understand, looking at Klimov with surprise.

"What is incomprehensible here," Klimov remarked with some condescension in his voice. - The Germans made a deal with Lenin, as you know, not at all from a good life. To save themselves from imminent defeat in the war, they needed to knock Russia out of the Entente. Lenin not only firmly guaranteed this to them, but also promised many things that made some people in Berlin simply dizzy. When practically all the promises of Vladimir Ilyich, no matter how fantastic they sounded, say, in 1912 or 1916, became a reality, the Germans, especially the Kaiser and his cabinet, began to be tormented by complexes. The essence of these complexes was that the imperial government was making a deal with "a bunch", or a gang, as some said, of extreme left-wing extremists, embraced by crazy ideas of world domination. You know, even while under the German boot, Vladimir Ilyich worked tirelessly on the tactics and strategy of the world revolution, and the "Bolshevik bacillus", as it was then called and is still called, was rapidly spreading in Germany, exhausted by a long war. Excuse me for some cynicism, but the Germans, in search of salvation, plunged into a zone of increased infectiousness, but they were smart enough to understand this. Realizing everything, they naturally decided to destroy the regime they had created in Moscow, which they could then quickly and easily.

- So what? Gorbachev asked with some incomprehensible fright, as if the "18th year of combat" was in the yard and he had to go to von Mirbach for instructions.

"Fortunately for us," Klimov continued, "the Germans were as smart as they were greedy. They were dizzy from what they managed to acquire under the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, and they, already on the verge of death, began to make plans to create a huge

empires from Paris to Tashkent, centered, of course, in Berlin. Adolf Hitler, having come to power, did not actually come up with anything fundamentally new that was not in the old Teutonic imperial dreams. You remember what they managed to achieve then. The Russian Empire collapsed and fell apart. All Ukraine, the Baltic states, Crimea were occupied, German troops landed in the Caucasus, occupied Georgia and went to join their Turkish allies in order to start a campaign in Central Asia. And all this with the consent and approval of Moscow, from which new additions and protocols to the Brest Treaty were squeezed out weekly. Naturally, the Germans constantly needed confirmation of the legitimacy of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and, before destroying the Bolshevik government, they had to form some other one that would confirm all the existing and planned articles of this treaty. In theory, everything seemed very easy to do. The Russian army ceased to exist, the fleet was either captured by the Germans, or was under the control of the Bolsheviks, which was basically the same thing. Industry and agriculture were in a state of complete chaos. It seemed that in such an environment, any political party would accept the proposal of the Germans, if only out of hatred for the Bolsheviks.

"I've never heard anything like it," Gorbachev admitted even with some confusion in his voice. What political parties are you talking about? What about SRs?

"No," the general replied. - You forget that the Germans occupied large cities such as Kyiv, Riga, Revel, and the whole Crimea. Representatives of many leading political parties in Russia fled there from Soviet Russia, because the country was a multi-party one.

- When? Under Kerensky? Gorbachev asked in surprise.

"And under the tsar," the general explained.

"Russia was an absolute autocratic monarchy, as far as I know from the course of history, where there have never been any political freedoms," the Secretary General got into the argument, "this is what helped the Bolsheviks seize and retain power. Viktor Ivanovich, these are the basics of history. What are you talking about?

"The basics of our history," Klimov explained patiently, "were created by Stalin, Zhdanov and Kirov. You blame me for not reading the Short Course. Read and submit reports. But, as they say, on duty I had to read a lot more. I am not telling you stories now, but I am reporting on the essence of the order that you

consider it so important.

"Good," Gorbachev said, sitting comfortably in his chair and pouring himself another glass of wine. — Sorry for interrupting. I, unlike you, had to read only party documents and agricultural reports. Please continue.

- Where did we stop? Klimov put his hand to his forehead. - Yes. So: not one of the most prominent Russian politicians, those who, on one authority, could form a government, at least a transitional one, before new elections to the Constituent Assembly, agreed to do this under the German protectorate. Nobody even wanted to hear about the confirmation of the Brest Treaty. According to the general opinion, Russia has not known a greater shame since the Horde of Batu's campaigns. In other words, no one had a desire to receive power from the hands of the occupation authorities in exchange for a good half of Russia. For the Germans, this was a surprise, allowing them to once again appreciate the genius of the leader of the world proletariat. All other Russian politicians turned out to be old-fashioned, extremely conservative and without any rudiments of internationalism.

thinking.

- You somehow present it all ironically, - the General Secretary said with some offense in his voice, - but even from your presentation it is clear how brilliant a politician and visionary Vladimir Ilyich was. You know, the one who is able to do what no one else can dare to do is already an outstanding person.

"Yes, no one argues," agreed Klimov. — Not just a genius could have volunteered to lead the people through the fire into the abyss, some other definitions are needed here. But, I beg your pardon, Mikhail Sergeevich, you always interrupt me. I am reporting to you on a completely different question, and all the time you confuse me with the topic "Vladimir Ilyich Lenin - the great organizer and inspirer of the October Revolution."

"Forgive me," Gorbachev said, "but I always take any criticism of Vladimir Ilyich very sharply, even if it is fair to some extent. After all, we are all members of the Leninist Party. And to listen to you, it turns out that it was a maniac, ready for anything in the name of his obsessive ideas of world domination. At the same time, he did not put Russia in a penny, destroyed the Russian people in the flames of revolutions and wars, and showed the rest of them the path leading to the abyss. It's just that some kind of Hitler turns out. I ask you, Viktor Ivanovich, speaking of Lenin, to avoid assessments and intonations that offend him, if only out of respect for to me.

- Can I continue? the general sighed.

"Of course, of course," Gorbachev replied. - Please continue. Just consider my friendly remarks.

Gorbachev knew what he was talking about. The same service of General Klimov or, on his instructions, the service of any other Directorate could record this conversation. A cassette with a recording, as sometimes happened, could unexpectedly appear at some extraordinary Plenum of the Central Committee and serve as a pretext for dismissing him from his post "for health reasons." Moreover, no one would have remembered the interlocutor of the Secretary General, who in this case was General Klimov, since it would be clear to everyone that the KGB officer was simply clarifying Gorbachev's true attitude to everything that "should be sacred for any Soviet person." Fully trusting Klimov almost everything about his intentions and plans, the Secretary General was still very wary when in his presence he (or someone else) tried to call a spade a spade, without resorting to ideological doublethink and newspeak.

As was customary in a medieval clerical state, and even a clerical-pagan one, one had to swear allegiance to the stone idols that made it such. There was a silence, during which the general got up, stretched, went to the bar and took out a pot-bellied bottle of cognac with a black label decorated with golden crowns, lion heads, banners and halberds.

"No, no," Gorbachev said hurriedly, "you know, liquor, cognac, wine—I don't like that. The pressure begins to jump, trouble with the doctors will begin again. And I do not advise you. What time do we fly back tomorrow?"

"I ordered the helicopter ready by eleven in the morning," said Klimov, pouring himself a glass of cognac, despite Gorbachev's warning. - Let's get some sleep. Your health, Mikhail Sergeevich!

"And you won't get sick, Viktor Ivanovich," the Secretary General replied, taking a sip from his glass. "Go on, please. I listen very carefully. Frankly, I'm interested in what you report.

After a bite of cherries, Klimov sat back in his chair, collected his thoughts and continued:

- So, the Germans' attempt to form any Russian government alternative to the Bolsheviks, which would confirm the articles of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, was not crowned with success. Then they remembered the Russian dynasty and the former Tsar Nicholas II, who stayed with his family in Tobolsk. All of them were kept under arrest, which could well be considered mild and domestic. Some members of the Romanov dynasty were at that time in the territories occupied by the Germans, in particular, the Empress Dowager, the wife of Alexander III, Maria Feodorovna, a Dane by birth, Grand Duke Nikolai Nikolayevich, who until 1915 was the Supreme Commander of the Russian armed forces, Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich and some other. The Germans cautiously probed their sentiments, promising to drive out the Bolsheviks, restore the Russian throne and put on it someone who recognizes the Brest Treaty. The responses ranged from politely cold to outright insulting. The threats to which the Germans, having lost patience, began to resort, did not help either, including the threat to hand over everyone to the Bolsheviks. Everyone agreed that death is better than such a shame.

"Look how proud they were," Gorbachev commented, "one might even say, deeply convinced people. "Better death than shame." It is a pity that now there are no people left who are ready to die for the sake of convictions.

"They believed," Klimov continued, "that not a single inch of Russian territory could be the subject of bargaining. Some, however, agreed to peace with the Germans, but on the terms of the status quo that existed in August 1914. Then the Germans remembered the Tsar himself. It's not that they didn't remember him before, they really did remember: Nicholas II was noted in one of the secret articles of the treaty as subject to extradition, together with his family, into the hands of the Germans. I must say that Nikolai knew about this and was afraid of a very similar possibility, considering such an act a continuation of Russian shame. He even, they say, publicly cried for the first time in his life when he learned about the signing of the Brest peace treaty. Now, seventy years later, one could say that he should have only rejoiced: he was pulled out from under arrest and handed over to "cousin" Willy, as he called the German emperor Wilhelm II. But such a Russian patriot, as Nikolai undoubtedly was, looked at all this in a completely different way. However, the Germans did not lose hope. The bet was made on the fact that Nicholas II was a very kind and gentle person ...

"So that's why he got the nickname 'Bloody'?" Gorbachev asked, not without malice.

"Mikhail Sergeevich," Klimov remarked irritably, "stop, for God's sake, constantly demonstrating to me that you had a "five" in the history of the USSR at school, and in the institute - in the history of the CPSU. I know this, and I also know how hard it was for us, Stavropol residents, to get these "five" in Moscow institutes. It is now well known that during the entire reign of Nicholas II, fewer people were executed than after him they were executed every day. That's why it was called "bloody".

"I don't understand at all," Gorbachev laughed, "how did you, Viktor Ivanovich, manage to graduate from a university in your time?"

- I graduated from a technical school, - the general admitted, - an agricultural one, in which, if my memory serves me right, you also studied. Only for an agronomist, and I for a veterinary paramedic. If it were my will, I would recruit all the personnel of intelligence and counterintelligence from former veterinarians.

- Why so? Gorbachev was surprised, to whom the reminder of his combiner past clearly improved his mood.

"Because," the general explained, "you can't ask a horse or a cow what it is.

sick or in pain. You need to understand everything yourself, comprehend and make a decision. Especially if you remember the times when people were sentenced for the death of a cow, and they were shot for the death of a horse. Remember how the entire veterinary department of the Red Army was shot?

"Indeed," the Secretary General laughed, "I somehow never considered the profession of a veterinarian from this point of view. And how many veterinarians do you have in Lubyanka?"

"Unfortunately," Klimov grunted in his tone, "there are more gynecologists ..."

"Shame on you," the chaste general secretary snapped at the general. "You always bring the conversation down to... I, you know, even in my youth... Anyway, okay. Go on."

"You always interrupt me," Klimov muttered displeasedly. - What we were talking about?"

"That," Gorbachev prompted, "that Tsar Nicholas II was a kind and gentle man."

"Exactly," Klimov remembered. - He was too kind and gentle, which did not at all correspond to the role of an autocratic monarch, as he was considered according to the then Russian laws. You know, in his entire life he never raised his voice to anyone, he never used his unlimited power, but he could hang anyone on the gallows, or send him to jail without a court decision.

- What are you saying? Gorbachev was surprised again. "I have never heard of it. Continue, comrade Klimov. All this sounds very interesting and new. I really love, you know, out-of-the-box thinking, like you."

"He loved his family," the general continued. - Although she did not always answer him with the same love. Add to this a terminally ill son, and you will be confronted with the image of a very interesting person, a man who, with an army of 15 million behind him, because of concern for his wife and sick children, abdicated the throne at a time when only a few resolute, not even deeds, but words, were enough to suppress the rebellion of the reserve battalions who were afraid to go to the front and the drunken mob of the capital.

Gorbachev wanted to correct Klimov again, who called the militant vanguard of the working class - the Petrograd proletariat - "drunk mob", but decided not to do this, but simply asked:

"Well, what does that prove?" It's common knowledge that he was spineless!

"That's the point," agreed Klimov. "This man, I mean the king, during all the twenty-three years of his reign demonstrated that the good of his family is dearer to him than the good of the state. Sometimes the burden of the royal burden, and you, Mikhail Sergeevich, can now appreciate better than anyone else what this burden is, was completely unbearable for him. At such moments, he either went on his yacht to the remote Finnish skerries, or left to hunt in Belovezhskaya Pushcha, away from business. In one of these moments of mental weakness, he was caught in Pskov in February 1917. With the then publicity, it was quite easy to get an idea of this or that state of mind of the head of state. Taking advantage of the position of the tsar and his family in 1918, the Germans conceived the following operation. They offer the tsar the restoration of his throne in exchange for peace on the terms of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. He can then hang the Bolsheviks himself, or they will do it for him with no less pleasure. I repeat: when the Germans had a similar idea, the former tsar with his family was in Tobolsk, where he enjoyed relative freedom, received guests, went to church - he, by the way, was a very religious person, in general, according to others, at that time for the first time I truly rested my whole life and, paradoxically, I felt free."

The first messages about the Brest Treaty reach Tobolsk, then at the end of February 1918, Baroness Buxgevdén, the former maid of honor of the court, appears. She gives Nikolai the offer of the Germans. He categorically rejects these proposals. The baroness advises the former emperor that he should not make any final decisions, but think over everything and prepare for moving to Moscow, then to Germany. In other words, the baroness is letting him know that he will be handed over to the Germans. And those will find ways to put pressure on him to confirm the articles of the ill-fated treaty. The tsar, on the other hand, is ready to live in Tobolsk or in another, more remote city, as long as he likes as a private person, but not to take part in politics, all the more so shameful.

The Germans are sure that he will change his mind if he falls into their hands, and the family remains in Siberia. Then, playing on the safety of his family, they can persuade the tsar to restore the scanty Russian kingdom as a German mandate, something like today's Namibia. German dreamers do not yet suspect that their empire remains to exist for a little more than six months, but in the big political game everyone for some reason believes that they are immortal. If every emperor or leader were aware of his own mortality, the whole of human history would take a different course. Would Hitler have started World War II if he knew that in six years he would have to shoot himself in a bunker? Would Lenin have started all his global events, had he known that in just five years he would begin to poop for himself?

"Well, I asked you," Gorbachev almost groaned, "not to talk about Lenin in such a tone in front of me. Enough of your historical digressions, really. Why did Lenin interfere with you so much? And in general, where did you manage to pick up such anti-Sovietism?"

"In the service," Klimov answered rather sharply. - So, the Germans demand from the Soviet government to deliver Nicholas II to Moscow. Note - one Nicholas. Previously, when signing the treaty, they justified their demand by the fact that the Empress was of German origin, and therefore her daughters should be considered German princesses, and her son was the Elector of the German Empire. There was no mention of Nicholas himself. The Germans simply rejoiced when they managed to throw him off the throne, disrupting the powerful offensive of the Russian army planned for the spring-summer of 1917, coordinated with the allies, which, according to all the calculations of experts, would have led to the collapse of Germany a year earlier, but with immeasurably worse for her consequences. Most of all, the Germans were afraid that some force uncontrollable by them would once again put Nicholas on the throne, and he would announce the denunciation of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, and then resume the war with Berlin. So now they demand delivery to Moscow and make vague promises to reunite the whole family sometime in the future.

"Interesting," Gorbachev said. - Did Lenin and other Bolsheviks really not know the obvious plans of the German side?

"Of course they were known," Klimov answered. — I believe, in all details. But when there are no real forces, knowledge of the enemy's plans can only bring moral satisfaction. All that Lenin and his associates could then afford was to play for time and deceive the Germans as far as possible, sometimes indecently rude and primitive. Every morning Vladimir Ilyich demanded a detailed report on the situation on the Western Front, as if he were not the head of the Republic, but Marshal Foch's chief of staff. The fact is that on the eve of all these events, the United States entered the war on the side of the Entente, and Lenin constantly reassured his entourage: "Since America intervened in the war, it means that the Germans will definitely end soon, otherwise she would not have intervened." And every day I waited for confirmation of my words. In the meantime, the Americans were transporting their expeditionary forces across the ocean to France, they could only play for time. But by and large, it resembled the actions of a sparrow that fell into the paws of a cat and tried to divert the attention of this very cat with its chirping, thereby postponing the inevitable end. As soon as something was not done the way they wanted, the Germans threatened to occupy Moscow and

Petrograd, arrest Lenin and others, bringing them to trial on charges of international terrorism, although in those years it was called a little differently.

"Think, what scoundrels! burst out Gorbachev, "how deftly they tried to take advantage of our temporary difficulties.

"There was a war," Klimov shrugged, "and both sides understood this very well. Wartime is somewhat different from peacetime. Did you survive the occupation in Stavropol, Mikhail Sergeevich?

"Yes," the Secretary General replied with a sigh, gloomily, "only it was then called not Stavropol, but Voroshilovsk. Stavropol, he again became on the orders of the German commandant. And when our people recaptured the city from the Germans, they forgot to rename it again. I was still a child then, but I will tell you, between us, of course, that the Germans, even in wartime on foreign territory, did not commit even a tenth of what Sheboldaev, Frinovsky and Kaganovich did in our region before the war. It is very good that our party so frankly admitted what a monstrous deformation of socialism Stalin allowed. I would say that the party has even become stronger by distancing itself from the excesses associated with the cult of personality.

"Undoubtedly," Klimov agreed, throwing a studying look at the Secretary General: is he serious or not. Knowing Gorbachev well, the general could not fully figure out when the general secretary was speaking sincerely, and when specifically for recording on tape, especially if he did not know for sure whether it was being conducted or not.

"However, we digress again," Klimov remarked, glancing at the beautiful mantel clock (a gift from an Amsterdam banker), "however, there is still time. Will you listen further, Mikhail Sergeevich - or have I already tired you?

"Go on, go on," Gorbachev asked, "your report is extremely interesting. It is not very often that I hear such interesting things, and even related to my own commission. If you had submitted the report to me in the proper way, in writing, then, I confess, I would not have had time to read it, but even if I had read it, half of it would not have reached me. And now I'm starting to understand something. So please continue.

"So," continued Klimov. - Under pressure from the Germans, a certain Vasily Yakovlev is sent to Tobolsk with an order signed by Sverdlov to deliver the tsar to Moscow. This Yakovlev is an exceptionally obscure person, one of the former Socialist-Revolutionary militants. At first it was believed that his surname was Myachin, but later it turned out that his surname was Stojanovic, although this is also not completely certain. They chose him precisely because he was frankly pro-German. Then the party, roughly speaking, was divided into two factions: pro-German and anti-German. This Yakovlev had many ambitions, but in the hands of people like Lenin and Sverdlov, he was just a pawn. And, as you know, a pawn can only move forward (it can no longer move back) and, if necessary, sacrifice it without any regret, especially if you need to strengthen your own position in some gambit, which will lead to no one knows where. So, to keep them behind, the Germans were informed: Yakovlev, at the head of a rather strong special-purpose detachment, was sent to Tobolsk for the tsar.

"I heard that," Gorbachev perked up, "at the same time, Sverdlov gave a secret telegram to Yekaterinburg to Philip Goloshchekin, his old friend, who then headed the Yekaterinburg Council, so that they would in no case let the tsar go with Yakovlev and keep them under arrest.

"So it is commonly believed," Klimov objected, "but the situation was somewhat different. There is no evidence that Sverdlov, simultaneously with the dispatch of Yakovlev's detachment, gave any

secret instructions to Yekaterinburg Goloshchekin, no. On the contrary, there is evidence that during the return of Yakovlev with the tsar to Moscow, an attack was being prepared against them. They wanted to blame him on Tatar or Bashkir nationalists: At the same time, both Nikolai and Yakovlev were to die. It is hard to say to what extent the preparation of such an event has moved into a practical direction, because the events did not flow at all as expected in Moscow and Berlin. In mid-April 1918, Yakovlev-Myachin arrives in Tobolsk and announces to Nikolai that he has an order to deliver him to Moscow, and one at that. Nikolai, of course, is interested in why he is being sent to Moscow and why alone? He declares with uncharacteristic decisiveness that he will not go anywhere alone. He and Yakovlev have several lengthy face-to-face conversations, about which Yakovlev later, after his second arrest in 1937, spoke in some detail during interrogations. The tsar resolutely said that he would never confirm the articles of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, even on pain of death. He had in mind, of course, his own death, and not the death of one of his relatives, for whose fate he was not at all worried at that time. He is still used to considering Russia of the 20th century a civilized country.

"Listen, Viktor Ivanovich," Gorbachev broke down again, "you always have some kind of uncontrollable subtext with an anti-Soviet flavor. It's not the first time I've noticed.

"I'm not making a report at the Plenum," snapped Klimov, "but I'm trying to paint the situation as it was. If you need an ideologically consistent text, then rummage through Lenin's complete works or read Kasvinov's book *Twenty-three Steps Down*. And you won't have to be nervous or interrupt me every two minutes, so let me continue.

Yakovlev reminded the tsar that he was under arrest and must obey. Moreover, he, Yakovlev, is only following orders. The king is confused. He does not want to go to Moscow at all, where the Germans, having turned his family into hostages, will dictate their shameful conditions to him. Yes, do not be surprised, but Nicholas II understood the situation in this way and was right in many respects. The only thing he did not understand was where the plans of the Germans and the Bolsheviks converged and where they diverged. In this case, he objectively played into the hands of the Bolsheviks, who knew perfectly well why the Germans needed him.

In desperation, the tsar turns for help to the only person whom he could still trust to some extent - to the head of the convoy guarding him in Tobolsk, Colonel Evgeny Kobylinsky, so that he would do everything possible; so that he, Nikolai, would not be taken to Moscow. Colonel Kobylinsky, who by that time had extensive agents in the region, began to spread rumors that Yakovlev's goal was to kidnap the tsar without the knowledge of the center, deliver him to Vladivostok and further abroad. Yakovlev, allegedly, was promised almost a million gold rubles for this, which he promised to share with Lenin and Sverdlov. The Ural regional council immediately demands that Yakovlev hand over the former tsar to them, and since he refuses, he is outlawed, the railway lines are blocked and measures are taken so that he can in no way take the tsar to European Russia. Completely bewildered, Yakovlev conducts endless negotiations with Sverdlov by direct wire. During the negotiations in Moscow, next to Sverdlov is Captain Fox, already familiar to us. Comrade Sverdlov explains the situation to him, emphasizing that the tsar does not want to come to Moscow, because he does not want, like the ancient Russian princes, to be taken hostage by the Tatars and die in the Horde at the yurt of the Khan. Here you need to understand that for four years there was a bloody war of extermination with the Germans, the like of which the then history did not yet know, and the attitude towards the Germans was appropriate: barbarians, Huns and the like. By the way, that war was called the Second Patriotic War in Russia, and the tsar hated the Germans more than the Bolsheviks, whom, apart from his attitude to the Brest Treaty, he did not know at all, he simply did not have time to recognize them yet. By this time, Soviet power had just managed to reach the Urals.

Therefore, no matter how paradoxical it may sound, Nikolai prefers to surrender under the patronage of the Bolsheviks as the only then existing power in the country, rather than be extradited to the Germans. He was too Russian.

Fox understands that even if he achieves the return of the tsar to Moscow by force, it will still not give any result: the sovereign will never confirm the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. And what can the Germans actually do with him? Torture? Never. Kill? It is absolutely unbelievable that Wilhelm II could have sanctioned anything like this. The only thing he could afford was to place the tsar in some mansion in the vicinity of Berlin, which the whole world would instantly know about, and convince him personally or with the help of his eloquent ministers. But this is a long and hopeless drag. Therefore, the Germans are ripening another, truly diabolical, plan. Let the king be transported to some local city that has a railway connection with the center, from where he can always be taken away, and the regime will be tightened. Then the representatives of those forces that dream of liquidating the articles of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and resuming the war with Germany will not be able to raise the banner of revanchism by capturing the tsar. In this, the positions of the Germans and the Bolsheviks completely coincided.

The tsar, as you know, was transferred to Yekaterinburg, placed in the so-called Ipatiev House, and a certain Avdeev, a drunkard and a hooligan, was appointed to command the guards.

The change in the situation in comparison with the regime in Tobolsk was striking. The king and his family constantly come across rudeness and bullying, they hear obscene abuse and drunken threats. From now on, the Empress and her four daughters are even obliged, pardon the expression, to keep the door open while in the toilet in order to be under the supervision of a sentry. Meanwhile, the German agents in the city, using their rich experience in organizing riots in Russia, excite the local mob, that is, excuse me, the proletariat, with demands to execute the "crowned executioner" and the like. Passions run high to the point that the authorities are forced to enclose the mansion with an additional fence and build machine-gun towers for fear of mob lynching. In parallel, rumors are spreading about the possible deportation of the tsar to Moscow, allegedly for an open trial of him, where, as you probably know, Trotsky was supposed to act as an accuser. Thus, through their agents and their people in the Cheka, the Germans, in modern terms, bring the tsar to condition. He, understanding the situation, will be more accommodating. In the meantime, the various forces of resistance to the Bolsheviks are raising their heads and organizing themselves after a short shock. Part of these forces - the armed detachments of the directory - are deploying, with the support of the rebellious Czechoslovak corps, which fell into a completely idiotic position after the conclusion of the Brest Peace, an offensive against Yekaterinburg. There is a danger that Nicholas will fall into their hands, and this, in the opinion of the Germans, will immediately lead to the annulment of the peace treaty and the resumption of the war. Many German mistakes stemmed from a misunderstanding of the most complex social processes that were then taking place in Russia. It must be admitted that, compared with the events taking place in 1918, the years of the reign of Nicholas II already seemed to be something between the Kingdom of God and communism, which Lenin promised. Accordingly, the popularity of the king also grew, especially among those strata that were traditionally considered anti-monarchist. All this, along with the constantly deteriorating situation on the Western Front, prompted the Germans to take decisive action. In Ekaterinburg, the eternally drunk Andreev is replaced by the cold and self-possessed Yurovsky, the famous commandant of the House of Special Purpose, as he is now called in history. Drunken mockery of the family of the former king stops, and there is a pause. Who is everyone waiting for? And they are waiting for our friend Captain Fox, who is going to Yekaterinburg with a platoon of German soldiers - veterans of the battles in Petrograd and on the Pulkovo Heights. We learned about this from the documents of the German Foreign Ministry seized by the Americans after the end of World War II. From them (copies we got with great difficulty, since the Americans make almost nothing public) it became clear that after the assassination of the German ambassador von Mirbach in Moscow, the Soviet government

could no longer resist the German demands as before, although even before these possibilities were very limited. I had to resort to tricks, even to gross deceit, for the sole purpose of buying time.

In early July, a decision was made to send Captain Fox to Yekaterinburg to deliver an ultimatum directly to the sovereign: either he agrees to the confirmation of the Brest Peace and is restored to the throne with German bayonets, or Fox, with the assistance of local authorities, eliminates Nikolai and the whole family so that the Germans no longer have a headache this occasion. Today, all German motives may not look very convincing, but then for the Germans this issue was of extreme importance.

As for the Bolsheviks, they just were not at that moment inclined to extreme measures. Trotsky and Sverdlov dreamed of a show trial of the tsar, modeled on the trial of Louis XVI, while the more practical Lenin believed that the royal family would be better kept as hostages in case, as he often put it then, "if we fly off and have to return to Zurich".

July 16, 1918 Captain Fox and his team arrive in Yekaterinburg. The city is almost in a state of siege. Artillery cannonade is heard. The army of the directory and parts of the Czechoslovak corps are approaching the capital of the Urals from three sides. It is clear to everyone that there is no way to keep the city. Under these conditions, Fox holds a meeting with Yurovsky, Goloshchekin and Beloborodov, then talks for two hours with "the tsar. What happened next is not entirely clear. Judging by the letter from Yurovsky that Boldin found in the archive, only Captain Fox and his team could carry out the sentence, and then take the corpses somewhere. Yurovsky and his men did nothing but wash the blood and possibly transfer the corpses to the truck, although this also looks doubtful.

So what do we end up with? Gorbachev asked. Where are the remains of this unfortunate family buried?

"As a result, we have a very strange story," said Klimov. "Neither Captain Fox, nor the king, nor one of his family members, nor a single person from his retinue has been seen since then, either alive or dead. But, if we assume that Fox took the corpses somewhere and either dumped them or buried them somewhere, then where did he and his team go? No traces were found in Moscow. He did not appear in Germany after the end of the First World War.

All this makes us think that he died on the way back to Moscow. Under the then state of affairs in Russia, it was very easy to die, as you understand.

Of course, another option is also possible. Having destroyed the royal family, Fox simply disappeared, realizing the responsibility that he had taken upon himself. He also knew that his own Kaiser would not award him an order for this. Perhaps he changed his last name, left Russia without visiting Moscow. However, it was also not necessary to return to Germany. Since Fox deserted in wartime, he could settle down and naturalize in any other country in Europe or America. This version is supported by the fact that the valuables belonging to his family, as well as a number of very important documents, disappeared along with the king. Having killed and robbed the king, Fox simply ran away, despite all his love for the Fatherland and the Kaiser. Opportunities like this come along once in a century, maybe less. In addition, having disappeared with the corpses, he put the entire Yekaterinburg Soviet in an idiotic position, primarily in front of the local workers, who had to tell stories about a barrel of sulfuric acid. Experts told me that it would take at least a railway tank of acid to dissolve eleven corpses. But to our people, do not lie - they will believe in everything. This is his strength. And ours.

"As far as I understand," Gorbachev said, "no one knows the exact burial place of the royal family and it cannot be discovered?"

"We will look for it," Klimov promised. "No one has taken this seriously yet. There are some clues. Let's try. Tell him about the boy or not? the general thought. - No, he won't understand, or he will say something like: "It's time for you to retire, Viktor Ivanovich, and you are entered into such areas. However, this issue can be discussed at the Plenum." Or tell everyone like that?

"Yes," Gorbachev sighed. - Everything is complicated in our country. I thought that your department already knows where someone is buried. It turns out that you have the same order as everywhere else.

Klimov wanted to answer something, but at that moment there was a gentle trill of a telephone call. The General Secretary picked up the phone and heard his wife's voice.

"Where are you," Gorbachev asked, "in Geneva?" He cast a wary glance at Klimov. - Yes. So what? On Sunday evening I will return to Bonn. What? They'll manage without me. Well, of course, buy if you like. Expensive? Well, I do not know. Decide yourself. What does expensive mean if the credit is not limited? What how? Okay, I'll come back and sort things out.

Gorbachev hung up the phone and, smiling, said to Klimov:

- Forever women with their problems! Such things happen, and they don't want to know anything but their trinkets.

Chapter 6

I

To Kumanin's credit, he rarely got lost. Surprises, whatever they were, never plunged him into a state of confusion, and on the contrary, forced him to work more clearly and collectedly, mobilizing all hidden reserves to make the most optimal decision.

Having discovered the disappearance of the folder with Nadia's dissertation, which he had so recklessly left on the table in the middle of the room, Kumanin did not freeze in an interrogative pose, did not rummage through the cabinets and drawers in the hope that he himself had shifted this folder somewhere, but immediately went to the front door to the his apartment and carefully examined it.

The house in which Major Kumanin lived was a departmental one, inhabited by a variety of small people from the Lubyanka, from old-time ensigns to young colonels. In the good old days, round-the-clock police posts were deployed in all entrances, where duty sergeants played the role of a sentry or a concierge. They stopped visitors, politely asked who they were going to, checked this fact on the internal telephone, and those who were objectionable were detained and sent to the nearest police station for identification. Along with the obvious advantages, such a system caused a lot of inconvenience, since all visitors to the house had to be registered in a special journal; it was absolutely impossible to take, say, a mistress to his home in the absence of his wife.

However, long before Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev formulated his brilliant thesis that "the economy should be economical", duty sergeants, under mysterious circumstances, gradually disappeared one after another. In their place appeared retired ensigns, as a rule, living in the same houses. The retirees, who in the past served either as prison guards or as controllers and escorts, were not

better than their predecessors, because they "knocked" with inspiration and with great knowledge of the matter, testifying to vast experience. By virtue of all the same Brezhnev's epoch-making economic discovery, they had to pay for their "work" at the expense of the tenants, which did not particularly please anyone. Opposition silently matured against the retirees. Since they were on duty at their place of residence, they often allowed themselves to be absent from their posts: either because of their own ill health, or because of the illness of their granddaughters. They took advantage of this, and the "institute of retired ensigns" was abolished.

The posts were empty for a short time. The room on duty in the entrance where Kumanin lived was either bought or rented by some cooperative that concluded a mutually beneficial agreement with the Lubyanka, which, like an icebreaker, was forging its country's path into new market relations. A huge lock appeared on the doors, and a lattice on the glazed wall, and the room began to fill with boxes and boxes with inscriptions in Korean. Only international umbrella-shaped markings indicated that the contents of the boxes were fragile and afraid of dampness. The elimination of guard posts did not affect the "criminogenic" situation in the departmental building in any way: both apartment thieves and ordinary drunks looking for a place to drink a bottle knew perfectly well which houses and entrances they could poke their nose into and which ones they could not. They could not be lured into the departmental house of the KGB with any gingerbread. Even the legends that all the apartments in the house were literally littered with Western and Japanese-made electronic audio-video equipment did not bother the burglars, although entire families were massacred in other houses in Moscow solely in order to steal some stamped "Vidik" made in South Korea.

As a result, the doors of the "Chekist" apartments were decorated to the limit with primitive locks inserted by the builders of the house. The only thing that some renters allowed themselves was to upholster the door with leatherette with beautiful copper buttons.

Kumanin was no exception at all. There was an ordinary "English" lock on its door, which, if desired, could be opened with a paper clip, knocked out with a shoulder or squeezed out with a screwdriver. Kumanin did not have a Vidik, although he could buy it in the shops of the so-called confiscated goods. Just at that time, two departments at Lubyanka were waging a merciless war on an all-Union scale with video recorders and video products, which, of course, were one hundred percent Western (since in the USSR this field of activity was in an embryonic-rudimentary state) and therefore fell under the articles of the criminal code or countless sub-legislative secret instructions. Any video cassette could easily be classified as openly anti-Soviet, as propagandizing war and violence, as pornographic, or simply as ideologically harmful. At first, the owners of video materials were given deadlines with mandatory confiscation of equipment and cassettes. As the "liberalization" and the spread of "new thinking" ceased to give deadlines, they were limited to warnings, but the equipment and video materials

continued to withdraw. All this led to a sharp increase in prices for these products from resellers. A "black video market" flourished, where the dashing guys from the KGB handed over in bulk some of the confiscated goods, thus planting new economic relations.

Kumanin had only a television and a West German tape recorder of valuables, bought for the noble purpose of resuming music in his spare time. Therefore, Kumanin considered that it would hardly occur to anyone to climb into his apartment in the hope of finding something worthy of attention there. After examining the door, Kumanin made sure that it had been wrung out by a car tire iron, the trace of which remained on the jamb. There was no need to "sin" on your colleagues. Sergei himself had to go to other people's apartments in order to place eavesdropping equipment there or conduct an unofficial search (before the official one). Like any operative, he knew how to do it without using such crude things as a pry bar or a chisel. When it was necessary to imitate burglary, special methods were used.

Kumanin decided to continue the investigation and went out into the street. Near the house, the owners of cars equipped with their own forces something like a guarded parking lot, although the "exterior" of the house enjoyed the same fame as its interior. Even sporty-looking young people in black jackets, who worked in the cooperative, went to duty carefully, as if they were going to church, and, entering the entrance, they turned their heads in a frightened way, apparently intending to see something terrible.

The parking lot was guarded by "Uncle Pasha", who in the past had been on watch for thirty years at the central checkpoint on the Lubyanka. Recently, he began to suspiciously often apply to the bottle (they said, with moonshine) and fell asleep at the post entrusted to him, in a specially knocked together small booth. But since nothing happened to the machines, such a malicious violation of the charter of the guard service was looked through with fingers and with a certain amount of healthy humor. Uncle Pasha was on duty. His mood for a number of reasons was elevated.

— Heard? he asked Kumanin. - Veterans of organs will now be given vodka without coupons?

"Exactly," Kumanin agreed, not wanting to spoil the veteran's mood. "Tell me, Uncle Pasha, did you leave your post this afternoon for a long time?"

- What are you, the head of the guard? - the old man was offended, - he went away - he did not go away, what business is it of yours? I report to the chairman of the cooperative ...

"Yes, I'm not talking about that," Kumanin waved him off. - What are you immediately climbing into the bottle? Did a strange car drive up to our entrance? Didn't notice? And he pointed with his hand to the entrance, located from the parking lot about forty meters.

Transferring the conversation to the usual official-search channel drove the offended expression from Uncle Pasha's face. The professional look of the old watchman fixed such things automatically.

"It was," he reported, rising inwardly, "only not right at your entrance, but, as it were, between yours and the neighboring one. Red Zhiguli. A citizen came out of them, stood at the entrance, examined the sign with the apartment numbers. I also thought it would be nice to detain him and check the documents ...

Uncle Pasha sighed:

- There is no power now, the duty at the entrances has been canceled. There is no money, they say, but the duty officers were handed over to warehouses by some black man ...

"So he stood and looked," Kumanin interrupted Uncle Pasha's lecture on the crisis of power, "and then what?"

— What then? the watchman asked. "Then he entered the hallway. I also thought maybe a TV master. He had a suitcase..."

- And the number of the car, for an hour, did not notice? Kumanin asked.

Uncle Pasha sighed again:

- It was too far. Eyes now are not the same, I did not see. What are you asking? What happened? This one with a suitcase in half an hour, so as not to lie, got out, got into the car and drove off.

"Nothing happened," Kumanin reassured the veteran, "I was just waiting for a friend, but I arrived late. Thank you Uncle Pasha. Happily off duty."

Returning home, Kumanin carefully examined the table on which the folder lay. Like any bachelor, Sergei did not often wipe the dust from the table and other household items. By the oblique light of the desk lamp he could clearly see the black rectangle where the folder had been. "There must have been fingerprints somewhere on the table or on the door, but don't call the police." Of course, he didn't have a forensic suitcase at home, to be honest, he didn't have it at work either. It would take at least half a day to get it from the forensics department. In addition, they could impose an escort forensic specialist, who now would simply be a burden.

The belief, firmly supported in society, that if a criminal left his "fingers" somewhere, they would definitely be found, was nothing more than another manifestation of social realism this time in forensic science. The discovered fingerprints, even if they were listed in the fingerprint file, were by no means always able to be identified, mainly due to the primitive state in which the fingerprint service was located. It was littered with hundreds of thousands of cards, the systematization of which no one had dreamed of for a long time. There was talk about the computerization of the file cabinet, but things in this direction went slowly, and the effect from it was expected no earlier than 1994. Therefore, Kumanin stopped "investigative measures into the disappearance of the folder with the chapters of the dissertation of the applicant Shestakova" and went to the kitchen to have a bite to eat. He warmed up the kettle and, taking out a pack of butter and half a loaf of bread from the "diplomat", saw Gibbs's book "House of Special Purpose", taken the day before from his own office, which, admittedly, he had completely forgotten about. Washing down his meager dinner with tea, Sergei leafed through the book, hoping to find the right place, which he had noted in his memory three or four years ago.

The book began with a description of the visit of the English King Edward VII to Reval on a beautiful summer day on June 9, 1908. The king arrived at the Reval raid on his yacht Victoria and Albert. Decorated with flags of coloring, huge panels of imperial and royal standards and St. Andrew's and St. Emperor Nicholas II with his family, including the Empress, four daughters and the four-year-old heir to the throne, Tsarevich Alexei, was waiting for the arrival of his august cousin aboard the Shtandart. The English king went on board the Russian yacht to the thunder of artillery salute from the escort ships of the imperial yachts. When the fireworks stopped, the king, hiding a stinging grin in his gray beard, listened to the greetings in English, which were addressed to him, one after another, by all four royal daughters. The oldest - Olga - was thirteen, the youngest - Anastasia - seven. King Edward was the heir to the throne until the age of sixty, and therefore was a notorious and sarcastic person. After listening to the greetings of the young princesses, he bluntly asked Alexandra Feodorovna: "In which inn did she teach her girls English?"

The proud empress flushed with humiliation. She was the granddaughter of the same English Queen Victoria, whose son was King Edward. English was, one might say, native to the Russian Empress, and she herself taught her daughters. Edward's question turned out to be a poisoned arrow aimed at one of the most painful places in her ego. After this visit, the empress decided to find a teacher for her children. So the Englishman Charles Sidney Gibbs, an English teacher, appeared in the royal family. Subsequently, he became so devoted to this unfortunate family that he did not leave it even after the abdication of Nicholas II from the throne. Together with them, he was placed under house arrest in the Alexander Palace of Tsarskoye Selo, and together with them he went to the distant Siberian city of Tobolsk. Gibbs wanted to follow them to Yekaterinburg, but the guards literally drove him away from his beloved students with rifle butts and bayonets. Having gone underground, the noble Englishman waited for the Whites to arrive in Yekaterinburg and assisted the work of the Extraordinary Commission of Inquiry appointed by A.V.

Kolchak to clarify the circumstances of the murder of the royal family. Gibbs worked together with investigator Nikolai Sokolov, who tried in vain to find the bodies of the dead. Then he had to retreat along with the white army. Returning to his homeland, he converted from Anglicanism to Orthodoxy, took monasticism under the name of Father Nicholas in memory of the martyr Tsar, and until his last days led the Orthodox community in Oxford. Charles Sydney Gibbs, or Father Nicholas, died in 1963 at the age of eighty-seven.

During his lifetime, C. Gibbs did not like to talk about what he had to endure in Russia, and even less about the last days of Nicholas II and his family, which he was destined to witness. During his lifetime, he wrote no memoirs and rarely appeared in print, although his name was often abused, especially during the famous scandal with the impostor Anderson, who tried to impersonate Princess Anastasia, the Tsar's youngest daughter. However, after his death, an extensive archive was discovered in the house of Nikolai's father, concerning his many years of life and activities close to the royal family. Hundreds of fragmentary notes, diaries, about a thousand photographs were found in the archive (Gibbs was an avid photographer), including unique photographs taken by him on the way from Tobolsk to Yekaterinburg, among others, thirteen-year-old Tsarevich Alexei and his sister Olga in the cabin of a river steamer " Rus", which took them to eternity.

Later, the American journalist John Trevin, with the help of his adopted son Gibbs, also an Orthodox priest, managed to compile and publish a book based on the documents of the deceased, illustrated with photographs of Charles Gibbs.

Kumanin leafed through this book. Finally, he stumbled upon the place he was looking for. Pushing aside his cup of unfinished tea, Sergei began to read the English text. Despite very occasional exercise, he has not yet lost the ability to read English.

Somewhere in mid-October 1917, Gibbs wrote, newspapers with a description of the so-called Fatima miracle reached Tobolsk. The sovereign received many newspapers in Tobolsk, including foreign ones, but they all arrived at least a month late. In mid-October, some newspapers arrived that had already been published in June and July. His Majesty gave me several newspapers to look at, where, under various headings, the description of the Fatima miracle was given. The essence of what happened was as follows. On May 13 of this year, near the village of Cova da Iria, located near the Portuguese city of Fatima, Lucia Ebobera, ten years old, Francisco Marto, nine years old, and his sister Jansita Marto, seven years old, were walking in a field near their homes. Suddenly, in the clear sky, the children saw a bright flash of light. Thinking that it was lightning, they rushed under the shelter of a large oak tree, but stopped in amazement when they saw a luminous ball of light green color hovering at a height of no more than three feet, inside which was a creature in a sparkling white robe with a face that radiated shine.

"Don't be afraid, I won't harm you," the creature said in a soft female voice.

Frightened children asked her who she was and where she came from.

"I came from heaven," she replied, "and I ask you to come here for six months every thirteenth day at this very time. Then I'll tell you who I am and what I want. After that, I will come to Earth for the seventh time."

She asked the children to pray daily to the Blessed Virgin and for peace on Earth. Then the ball in complete silence began to rise and disappeared. Three children returned home and tried to tell their parents about the vision sent down to them, but the adults did not take this story seriously. But word of the miracle spread, and when on June 13 the children again went to the old oak, they were accompanied, keeping at a respectful distance, by a small group of pilgrims. The pilgrims saw a light green sparkling ball hovering on the level

children's eyes. Those who dared to come closer heard the voice. But it was the voice of Lucia Ebober.

"When the night is illuminated with an unprecedented light," the girl said, looking somewhere into the distance, "know that this is a great sign that the Lord gives you, who wants to punish the world for its crimes. To prevent the coming misfortune, I asked the Lord to punish only RUSSIA. If my request is granted, Russia will be punished with a TRANSFORMATION. Pray for Russia!"

All the newspapers noted that illiterate peasant children from a remote Portuguese village had some idea of Russia. It was just incredible! "Meanwhile," Gibbs continued, "after the call to pray for Russia, which the Lord decided to punish with transformation, Lucia announced the final verdict of the Holy Virgin. This happened on July 13, 1917. "The Lord has firmly decided to punish Russia, and her disasters will be incalculable and the suffering of the people will be terrible. But the mercy of the Lord is boundless, and all suffering has a time limit. Russia will know that the punishment is over when I send a youth to announce this, appearing in the heart of Russia. You won't have to look for it. He will find everyone and declare himself";

Later, the girl said that the Blessed Virgin told her a lot of information about the future of mankind, but asked her to keep it secret.

Looking ahead, I note that this was all the information about the Fatima miracle that we managed to get in Tobolsk. After the Bolshevik coup, newspapers simply stopped coming. Most Russian newspapers were closed, and foreign ones were not allowed into the dying country. The punishment of transformation began and quickly gained momentum. The emperor, reading these messages, was shocked. "All the will of God," he said. — The Lord cursed Russia. But tell me, Mr. Gibbs, why? Is Russia worse than others? Is she more to blame for this war than Germany or France, who could not divide Alsace and Lorraine in any way? "If I were Your Majesty," I observed cautiously, "I would not attach much importance to these newspaper reports. You know the newspapermen and their perennial tendency to exaggerate. In Catholic countries, cases like the Miracle of Fatima are far from uncommon. There have been at least a dozen in the last two hundred years in France, Italy, Spain and Portugal. And in Spanish America..." "Oh, no! the sovereign interrupted me. - Not a single Portuguese newspaperman would have thought of putting prophecies about Russia into the mouth of this girl. Why do they need Russia? I also know of similar cases in the past. But it all came down to, if at all, denying the Divine essence of what was happening in order to attract pilgrims to a certain place or to obtain subsidies and donations for some nearby monastery. In Portugal, not only this illiterate village girl, but most of the newspaper owners know as much about Russia as we do about them, even less. Who could put into the mouth of a girl, probably a future saint, words specifically about Russia. Well, imagine, Mr. Gibbs, that in our country, say, Seraphim of Sarov would prophesy about Portugal, France, or about your country? Who would hear it?

The sovereign thought for a moment, lit a cigarette nervously and continued: "I often recall the prophecies of St. Seraphim to Emperor Alexander I. Have you heard of them? No? There is a legend that Tsar Alexander I the Blessed visited the elder, and he told him. "Your generation will last three hundred years and three years. It began in the Ipatiev house and will end in the Ipatiev house. It began with Michael and will end with Michael.

"Good God," I whispered.

"He said many other things, which I do not quite understand," continued the sovereign. — That on his relics the forge of the devil will be built to destroy the entire human race, that

Russia will be flooded with blood for her sins. But the Lord is merciful. He will allow Russia to rise from the ruins and ashes, about which he will warn all Russian people with miraculous signs on the holy day of the Transfiguration of the Lord. The elder also spoke of a miraculous youth who, having appeared, would deliver Rus' from the filth of black paganism. Do you see, Gibbs, how all this matches the words of the Portuguese girl from Fatima?

The emperor made the sign of the cross over himself.

"God knows," he said after a pause, "that I loved Russia and its people, handed over to me by the Lord. I tried to correct the mistakes of my ancestors, who were afraid to give the Russian people not only freedom, but also will. I gave everything, and I was cursed. After the death of my father, when I assumed his throne, it seemed to me that I had plunged into some kind of whirlpool. This whirlpool twisted me, not letting me come to my senses, for all twenty-three years and threw me here, in Tobolsk, as in one of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories.

The sovereign smiled sadly, and in his kind eyes there was neither grief nor fear, but some kind of mystical calm understanding of the impossibility of fighting the almighty Doom.

"We, in England," I remarked, "many economists noted the reign of Your Majesty as an absolutely unprecedented phenomenon in the history of the Russian state. I would never have gone to St. Petersburg if I had not known from the newspapers and from knowledgeable people that in Russia, thanks to the efforts of Your Majesty, a bright era of freedom and prosperity began. As if someone lifted the black curtain that closes paradise ... "

"I was born on the day of Job the Great Martyr," the sovereign said, apparently not listening to me. "Everyone born on this day lives under some kind of curse. And I constantly felt that it was hanging over me, I wanted to lead the country out of the medieval impasse. I took the advice of such intelligent people as Bunge and Witte, who believed that it was enough to lay a sufficient number of railways, and the country would enter European civilization along them. We built the longest railroad to Vladivostok and ended up in a war with Japan that ended in disaster. I dreamed of family happiness, I madly loved and love my poor wife, but we have a terminally ill son, who was born in the midst of the Japanese war. Maybe the Lord already then warned me for my sins? I have made every effort to end this damned war as quickly as possible and on any terms, and have received unrest in the country. Having figured out what the people, all estates, wanted from me, I tried to give them this: the intelligentsia full freedom of expression, parties and unions, the merchants - meager taxes and state protection, the peasants - the land. "Your Majesty's activities," I said, holding back my tears, "would have been crowned with complete success, if not for this accursed war that broke out among the Christians, like God's wrath that fell on Sodom and Gomorrah. Your Majesty's army was not ready for such a war, as, indeed, the armies of other countries. The monstrous human losses in this war that Russia suffered, of course, demanded and require some kind of atonement, which was cleverly used by the forces that traditionally hate Your Majesty and are trying to lay responsibility for everything on you." "If then," the sovereign whispered with a sigh of spiritual pain, "Grigory Efimovich had not been wounded, God rest his soul, he would have done everything so that Russia would not enter this ill-fated war. He warned me. He said in fact the same thing as Saint Seraphim and this Portuguese shepherdess. Grigory Efimovich was enlightened by God and could have done it. What could I do? I was bound by contracts that I did not conclude, I had obligations that I did not accept. I had to and wanted to remain a decent person, whose word at least means something. I told you about the whirlpool that pulled me and the whole country into the pool. But not me, not me, Gibbs, started this war! But if I'm to blame for not being firm enough, then what does Russia have to do with it? I always felt like I was cursed. But why did they curse Russia along with me? I see it happening, but I don't understand why."

All this the sovereign spoke without a shadow of hysteria, in a quiet and calm voice. The emperor knew how to control himself under any circumstances. He was the most noble and self-possessed person I have ever seen. The misfortunes that fell upon him from all sides aged him a little, but did not break him.

The emperor went to a small table where the Bible lay, which he read every day, opened it and pulled out a small sheet of paper, hidden between the pages, folded in half. His Majesty unfolded the sheet and handed it to me.

During the years spent in Russia, I learned to read and write very well in Russian, but the paper that the sovereign handed me was scrawled like children's scribbles, and I could not make out a single word. "Forgive me," said the Emperor, "I understand that you find it difficult to decipher this handwriting. I myself managed to read the letter with great difficulty, although the handwriting is familiar to me. This is the last letter written to me by Grigory Efimovich on the eve of his murder. Listen to him, Mr. Gibbs: "I am writing this letter, the last letter that will remain after me in St. Petersburg. I have a premonition that I will die before January 1 (1917). I appeal to the Russian people, to Dad, Mom and Children, to the whole Russian land, what they should know and understand. If I am killed by ordinary murderers, especially by my brothers - Russian peasants, then you, the Russian Tsar, should not be afraid of anything, you will remain on the throne and will rule, and you, the Russian Tsar, should not be afraid for your children - they will rule in Russia is still hundreds of years old. But if I am killed by the boyars and nobles, if they shed my blood, and it remains in their hands, then for twenty-five years they will not be able to wash my blood from their hands. They will have to flee Russia. Brothers will kill brothers, everyone will kill each other and hate each other, and in twenty-five years not a single nobleman will remain in Russia. King of the Russian Land, if you hear the ringing of the funeral bell for the murdered Gregory, then know: if one of your relatives is guilty of my death, then I will tell you that none of your family, none of your children and relatives will live more than two years. And if he lives, he will pray to God for death, for he will see the shame and shame of the Russian land, the coming of the Antichrist, pestilence, poverty, destroyed Temples of God, spat on shrines, where everyone will become a dead man. Russian Tsar, you will be killed by the Russian people, and the people themselves will be cursed and will become an instrument of the devil, killing each other and multiplying death throughout the world. Three times for twenty-five years there will be black robbers, servants of the Antichrist, to exterminate the Russian people and the Orthodox faith. And the Russian land will perish. And I am dying, I have already died, and I am no longer among the living. Pray, pray, be strong, think of your Blessed family."

The emperor finished reading, folded the letter and put it back into the Bible. I sat there, shaken to the core. In the past, I had to meet Grigory Rasputin several times, and he did not make any impression on me, although I knew that he often managed to relieve severe attacks of hemophilia in the prince, while the court doctors signed for impotence and predicted the boy's imminent death. Less than a year after Rasputin's death, the tsar and his family, having lost their throne, were in exile, and His Highness's health was deteriorating every day. One leg of the Tsarevich did not actually work.

All these prophecies, which came true before my eyes, had a strong effect on me, and it began to seem to me that I was not present at the usual cataclysm generated by the European war and the Russian revolution, but really at the fulfillment of the Will of God. "Perhaps," the sovereign interrupted my thoughts, "the Lord cursed the country and me as its ruler because we could not save the Holy Man whom he sent down to us. The Jews were cursed for not saving Christ. This means that now the Russians will face the same fate: dispersion around the world, general contempt, replaced by a period of compassion, eternal persecution ... "" Your Majesty," I dared to interrupt the sovereign. Forgive me, but I think you're exaggerating. The late Rasputin is still not Christ, but the Russians are a relatively young nation. It seems to me that she has not yet reached the peak of her power, which the Jews have long

passed. There were probably more Jews among Your Majesty's subjects than in all other countries combined, and you could see that the main tragedy of the Jews is the absence of their own state, which they so recklessly sacrificed for the sake of personal freedom. I think the Russians will be smarter. They will sacrifice themselves and freedom in order to save the state, which, according to all the prophecies, will inevitably be reborn." "In seventy-five years," the sovereign whispered. - Grigory Efimovich was right. I already pray to God that he send down a quick death to all of us ... "

Sergei slammed the book shut, inhaling heavily. "After all that he had experienced and changed his mind, Gibbs, of course, acted very wisely by becoming a monk. And in general, all this is interesting, unless, of course, fabricated later. Indeed, why did this Portuguese shepherdess suddenly start talking about Russia and its punishment by "transformation". If you believe all this writing, the term of this punishment ends in two years. Or maybe, with the beginning of Gorbachev's perestroika, it has already ended?"

It must be said that Kumanin has not seen any misfortune with the country over the past seventy years, unless, of course, one counts the period of the Civil and Patriotic Wars. There were in Stalin's times, that is, a very long time ago, some excesses in the struggle against the remnants of the exploiting classes, traitors and degenerates. But these excesses are frankly and fundamentally condemned by the Party. If anyone suffered during this period, it was more likely not the people, but the security agencies themselves, whom the party constantly made responsible for their own mistakes and punished with excessive severity. Therefore, all these mystical conversations between the tsar and Gibbs and their references to the incident at Fatima and the adventurer Rasputin aroused in Sergei a feeling that could be called "ironic irritation." The facts, the conversation itself aroused irony in him, but irritated him with its tendentious orientation. Behind the glossy cover of the book, attributed to Charles Gibbs, one could feel the skillful hand of a CIA editor. She sounded very modern and anti-Soviet. Reading all this mystical nonsense, Kumanin could not help thinking about Alyosha Lisitsyn and his namesake, who disappeared during Stalin's events on the eve of the war.

II

On Sundays, Kumanin liked to sleep well, but this time he set the alarm for half past five in the morning in order to have time to go to the gas station and get to the village of Nefedovo, find Feofil Pimenov and return back to Moscow today. On Monday, he planned to appear at the service, as expected, at nine zero-zero in case Klimov returned.

The Simferopol highway was beginning to heat up, although there were still few cars. The beautiful forests near Moscow either approached directly to the gray ribbon of the highway, then parted, revealing the industrial and agricultural landscape of the near Moscow region: fields planted with potatoes, smoking chimneys of some factories and thermal power plants, dull villages and summer cottages, striking with the wretchedness of tar paper roofs. From time to time, yellow Icaruses of suburban routes roared at Kumanin, overtaking his car or rushing towards him. Going on today's trip, Sergei almost took advantage of one of them, but abandoned this idea. The intercity bus station was too far from his house, by the time he got to it, he could drive half the way to Serpukhov. In addition, he liked to drive, and now, having rolled down the window, he enjoyed the coolness of the early morning. He didn't think about anything. The receiver was tuned to the wave of the "Mayak", which transmitted music from operettas, which contributed to relaxation. Five minutes of news sounded in the background and did not reach consciousness.

The forest moved closer to the road again, and Kumanin, with some surprise, saw in front of him a covered green wagon, obviously of an army type. He was convinced of this when he drove closer, the registration number of the van was marked with military markings in the form of the letter "T",

enclosed in a white triangle. Sergei slowed down. The van occupied almost the entire roadway, and it was impossible to bypass it. The dividing curb, which appeared inopportunely on this section of the highway, prevented us from entering the oncoming traffic lane. Cursing, Kumanin trudged along after the van, hoping that the road, having jumped out of this forest gorge, would become somewhere wider, and he would be able to overtake the "warrior". Suddenly the van turned on the right turn and began to turn heavily onto the paved road that opened up among the parted trees, which departed at a right angle from the highway and led somewhere into the forest. The turn was decorated with an impressive prohibition "brick", and a glass traffic police booth hung over the road, next to which was a pair of police "gas trucks" and a motorcycle with a sidecar.

Kumanin slowed down to let the van pass. A broad-shouldered "traffic cop" in captain's shoulder straps with a gloomy face, with a majestic wave of his baton, ordered him to pass, which Kumanin did. "But why would a traffic police post be deployed in such a place, where there is not even a side of the road?" - he thought, - but, remembering the "brick" at the turn, he guessed that it was just the guards of some military facility disguised as traffic police. Somewhere further, another post with a barrier, a striped booth and soldiers will probably be set up. Kumanin had to visit such objects several times, which sometimes turned out to be entire cities not marked on the map. Kumanin was convinced of the correctness of his guess when, after only three kilometers, on the highway that jumped out of the parted forest, right in the middle of the potato fields, he saw another, no less fundamental, traffic police post. On the paved sump for cars, a wheeled tractor with a trailer languished under the sun, in the cab of which, with his head on the steering wheel, the driver was either sleeping or sobering up.

The sergeant, stupefied with heat and boredom, with an imperious gesture, characteristic of a provincial inspector, ordered Kumanin to stop. Sergei wanted to ignore this order, out of KGB habit. The young shoots of the KGB, and not only them, loved to organize races with traffic inspectors, and when the enraged "traffic cops" managed to win these races, they shoved their certificates under their noses and accused them of disrupting a particularly important and extremely secret task, threatening to expel them from service and hand over under court. After that, the faces of the policemen usually turned gray or pale, which served as a prize in such competitions. KGB officers, from guard ensigns to colonel generals, thus asserted themselves. However, sometimes a traffic police officer had the courage to draw up an act on road hooliganism and send it to the Lubyanka - such cases are rare, but they did happen. The authorities had to knock down arrogance from their subordinates, issuing reprimands and threatening with dismissal. After such jokes led to serious traffic accidents with human casualties, an order followed, according to which it was allowed to "detain on a general basis KGB officers who maliciously violate traffic." Literally a week later, the "traffic cops" detained a KGB brigade on the Leningradskoye Highway, which was heading for a search, and even issued an act stating that everyone was drunk. It almost came down to shooting. While the parties were sorting out who was right and who was wrong, time was lost, and the operation was thwarted. The "traffic cops" threatened to complain to the Central Committee, the commanders of the KGB units urged their subordinates not to contact the "cops", and the leadership of the Ministry of Internal Affairs urged their employees not to touch the "gebills". Both punitive services of the USSR, originating, like Arabs and Jews, from the same "Abraham" root, treated each other with distrust and contempt, sometimes growing into open hostility. As a result, that order had to be cancelled.

This time Sergey stopped the car and got out, stretching his legs with pleasure. The sergeant frowned:

— Documents for the car and rights!

Kumanin held out his ID. With the same frown on the face of the sergeant

put his hand to the visor:

- Drive!

- Is it far from Nefedovo? Kumanin asked.

"Three kilometers," the sergeant muttered and, turning, went to his motorcycle.

A few minutes later, Kumanin saw a rickety post on the side of the highway, on which there was a faded blue sign with letters of the name gray from dirt: "Nefedovo".

Nefedovo turned out to be a fairly large settlement, judging by the two- and one-story houses and a couple of decapitated churches, quite old. On the central square, as usual, there was a grocery store, a post office and a bus stop. On the pole, instead of a plate with the bus number, there was an announcement written on a piece of plywood, which informed local residents that, for "technical reasons", buses from Serpukhov to Moscow would not stop in Nefedovo until August 1.

The grocery store was crowded with people. In the middle of the square, languishing from the heat, several stray dogs were sleeping. A group of young guys are frozen in motorcycle saddles at the entrance to the grocery store, waiting for something. There was patriarchal silence.

Kumanin stopped the car. A man of indeterminate age walked past her, overgrown with stubble, in greasy trousers. He was heading towards the deli. Sergei opened the car door and asked:

"Countryman, tell me, where is the Kommunarov passage here?"

- What? The man looked dumbfounded at Kumanin. — Which communards? What do you need?

"I need Kommunarov Street," repeated Kumanin patiently, "where is it, how can I get there?"

- Street? the man asked. - So I would say that you need a street. Near. Go along this street to the Kumanin almshouse - it is exactly on the corner of Kommunarov and stands.

- What almshouse? Sergei thought he had misheard. - What did you call her?

"Kumaninskaya," the man repeated irritably, glancing anxiously in the direction of the grocery store — in the old days there was an almshouse there, and now our "cop", a sobering-up station and a penal colony ... And he went on.

— But why Kumaninskaya? Kumanin called after him. He looked back:

— Yes, everything here is Kumanin. The village was Kumanino in this place, a long time ago, at the same time ... how is it?

"With the tsar," prompted Kumanin.

- Wow! the passer-by agreed and firmly headed for the deli.

Kumanin drove in the indicated direction and quickly reached the building of the "Kumanin almshouse".

Once it was a one-story house with a built-in church, which, of course, was destroyed and another floor was built on. The large windows on the ground floor are now barred. Two policemen were smoking lazily on the porch. A little to the side of the official signboard "Department of Internal Affairs under the Settlement Council" was a small, but clearly visible

Memorial plaque. Without getting out of the car, Kumanin read: "In this building in December 1917, the Bolshevik Nefedov A. M. organized the first branch of the Cheka of the Serpukhov district." Therefore, Kumanin decided, the village is called Nefedovo, but why before that it was called Kumanino? Will have to find out.

On the wall of the former almshouse, with white paint, just between the police sign and the memorial plaque, it was inscribed: "Kommunarov 21". In search of house No. 5, Kumanin drove further along this street. With the exception of the former almshouse, all the other houses in Kommunarov Passage were wooden, of varying degrees of preservation, for some reason all of them were light green in color, like soldiers' tents. House No. 5 turned out to be at the very end of the street, which ran into the forest. It was surrounded by a small front garden of slats, behind which one could see a flower bed, several beds and currant bushes. At the back of the yard, a long-haired bearded man was chopping firewood and putting it in a woodpile.

Sergei Stepanovich turned around on the road, drove straight up to the footbridge leading to the gate through a roadside ditch and stopped the car. A few minutes later he was already entering the open gate, defiantly playing with the car keys.

The bearded man stopped chopping wood as soon as he saw the car stop at the gate, and froze with an ax in his hand, looking warily and with curiosity at the approaching Kumanin.

- What do you want? he greeted Sergei not very kindly.

- Pimenov Feofil Pimenovich - is that you?

"Let's say," the bearded man answered, tapping the butt of the ax on the palm of his left hand.

"Here on the corner of your street," Kumanin said dryly, "there is a police station. We will find your red car later, but for now we will issue a detention - you committed a burglary last night in Moscow. Get ready.

"Aren't you afraid," Theophilus asked, "that I will now bless you with an ax to the head?" You burst into my yard, and you threaten me.

"I'm not afraid," Sergei admitted. "I think you're smart enough not to." The ax can turn into physical evidence, the memory of which will hiccup you for the rest of your life. Yes, and taking it away from you is a matter of seconds. Demonstrate?

"Don't," Theophilus said dully, thrusting the ax into the plate. - I'll warn my mother, can I?

"If you don't mind," Kumanin smiled, "I'll go with you." I don't feel like chasing you around the local gardens.

Theophilus did not answer, and together they entered the house.

"Mom," Feofil said, "I'm going to Moscow for a little while. A friend has arrived...

An old woman of about sixty-five came out of the corner room, walking heavily on her sick legs. Glancing at Kumanin, she calmly asked:

- Are they picking up again? Collect warm clothes and grubs?

To be honest, Kumanin did not know what to do next with Theophilus. Take him to Moscow? But where and to whom? In fact, Kumanin was the victim and, according to the law, had to call the police on the fact of burglary, write a statement, indicate the suspect and wait

investigation results. He did not have the right to detain Pimenov on his own and understood perfectly well, taking advantage, as usual, of the complete legal illiteracy of the Soviet population, he only wanted to intimidate Pimenov in order to then draw out more information. Now Kumanin decided to take Theophilus to the local police station so that he would feel guilty, to talk with him in the office of the local chief, after having escorted him (if he was there) to smoke on the street. In parting, he had a sacramental phrase prepared: "For now, go home. When you need us, we call."

Therefore, Sergei continued to stand silently in the doorway, trying not to look either at Theophilus's bewildered face, or at his mother, who was collecting things and food for her son in a backpack. He was a little surprised that the woman did not lament or ask any questions, as if she was not interested in where and for how long her son was taken away so unexpectedly, and that he, in the end, done. Only later did Kumanin learn that Klavdiya Ivanovna—that was the name of Theophilus's mother—had extensive experience in this regard: five arrests of her husband, the arrest of her eldest son, who had disappeared in the zone, and two arrests of Theophilus himself. And that's not counting the ten years she herself spent in the camp. It's good that she didn't ask any questions then, because the bluffing Kumanin wouldn't know how to answer them.

- Have you gone? - said Theophilus and turned to his mother. "Don't worry mom, it's some kind of misunderstanding..."

The old woman didn't answer, she just shook her head and sighed. "Well, you bastard! - Kumanin thought - he climbed into someone else's apartment with a tire iron and says something else about a "misunderstanding".

"By the way," he said, "grab Shestakova's dissertation, please." And let's go.

- Why did you decide that I have it? Theophilus muttered.

"Let's not waste time," Kumanin grimaced, "don't take me for a fool. You left so many fingerprints in my apartment that it would be better if you posted your passport right away. Grab your dissertation and let's go! You can't do a search with witnesses. After all, if we start looking for a dissertation, we will find many more interesting things. What do you think, Feofil Ivanovich?"

"Listen," answered Theophilus, "why do you need this dissertation? Nadya Shestakova is on the verge of a fundamental discovery in the field of psychiatry. If it gets to you, it will disappear into your cellars, like tens of thousands of other ruined authors along with their works. You arrested Shestakova. So leave at least her work so that you can finish it.

- What makes you think that we arrested Shestakova? Kumanin interrupted him.

"Where did she go?" Theophilus answered a question with a question.

- I want to find out from you, - said Kumanin, - I was hoping to find you and her here. She's been here, hasn't she?

"I have been more than once," Theophilus confirmed, "but where she is now, I don't know, believe me. You are Nadine's classmate, you work for the KGB. Is your surname Kumanev? Nadia told me a little about you.

"Kumanin," the KGB major corrected him. — Kumanin. Sergei Stepanovich.

He noticed that Theophilus's mother looked at him somehow strangely, if he were not

by a representative of the authorities taking her son to prison, but by a curious specimen. Kumanin felt uneasy.

"After all," he said irritably, "I took this dissertation from Lidia Fyodorovna in order to familiarize myself and intended to return it. If you needed it so much, you should have called me on the phone, and, with the consent of Nadya's mother, of course, I would have given it to you. Instead, you decided to break into my apartment in broad daylight. Have you thought what an idiotic position in front of Nadya's parents put me? By the way, why didn't you go yourself, sent some friend of yours, who wrote out my address from Lydia Fedorovna?"

- I was afraid to light up, - Theophilus honestly admitted. - Judge for yourself: first, a whole brigade from the Lubyanka grabs Alyosha Lisitsyn. Nadya said that she would try to find out something, since she has acquaintances there, apparently she meant you. Then she disappeared on her own. The next day you show up and withdraw her dissertation. I wanted to save what was possible - my dissertation. Of course, I could not even think that you would count me out so quickly. I thought you didn't know me at all...

"Can you explain to me," Kumanin asked, "what all this means?" What kind of boy is this, because of which all the fuss flared up? To tell you honestly, I don't know at all whether Nadya Shestakova has been arrested or not. You can guess about it, nothing more. Such an assumption can lead very far down the wrong path ...

"Are you going to stand in the hallway like that?" Klavdia Ivanovna intervened, continuing to examine Kumanin. Sergei felt her curious gaze on him and was nervous, without knowing why.

"Go into the room," she continued, "and talk there, at least until morning.

Theophilus looked inquiringly at Kumanin, who thought for a moment, but then waved his hand:

- Okay, let's talk here, with you.

Theophilus had a small room, no more than ten square meters. The windows overlooked blackcurrant bushes. Apparently, against the background of these bushes, Nadya, Theophilus and Alyosha Lisitsyn were once photographed. There was a table in the room, decorated with a table lamp with a homemade lampshade. Several bookshelves hung on the wall, on which books in foreign languages sparkled with bright spines, mainly, as far as Kumanin understood, on psychiatry and physiology. An old photograph of a priest in vestments and with a cross on his chest hung, and a little further on, a bright popular print, in which a large ship, as a result of a terrible explosion, lifted the stern, went into the abyss. Small figures of people jumped overboard and floundered helplessly in the waves. In the center of the picture, two hefty angels, spreading their swan wings, carried someone in a marine uniform over the waves, like wild geese Ivanushka.

— Danton? asked Kumanin, catching Theophilus' wary glance.

"No, not the Danton," Theophilus sighed, "it's the Petropavlovsk." My grandfather served on it and miraculously escaped, after which he became a priest. Family heirloom. He bought it himself in Moscow at the market.

Coming closer, Kumanin saw that at the bottom of the picture, in letters stylized as Slavic script, it was written: "The insidious sinking of the battleship Petropavlovsk by the Japanese and the miraculous rescue of Grand Duke Kirill Vladimirovich." Now it became clear that it was the Grand Duke Kirill who was carried by the angels.

"Yes, yes," Kumanin said, somewhat embarrassed, "I heard about it." There, one of the very famous people died ...

- The artist Vereshchagin, - prompted Feofil, - and Admiral Makarov.

- Kirill Vladimirovich, it seems, later, in exile, became the main contender for the throne, and now his son, Vladimir Kirillovich. So many years have passed, but they all do not want to admit their defeat, they hope for something, - Kumanin examined the popular print with genuine interest. You say your grandfather served there. And what happened to him then?

"After the rescue from the Petropavlovsk," answered Theophilus, "he became a priest. There was a large village with three churches. In 1918 he was killed.

- Who? Kumanin asked.

"Yours," Theophilus said calmly. - VChK. The evil paranoid Nefyodov, a former criminal, came here. He was released from prison by the February Revolution. He arrived already as an authorized representative of the Cheka. By his order, all priests, merchants, teachers, officers, including collegiate registrars, were arrested in the surrounding villages. They were taken to Serpukhov, loaded onto two barges and drowned in the Oka River. Once upon a time, it was even forbidden to talk about it, and recently a whole article about this was published in the local newspaper Znamya Ilyich: "The Serpukhov tragedy".

"It was such a time," Kumanin sighed. - The revolutionary proletariat got rid of alien classes ...

- So, you are the same Colonel Kumanin, - Feofil unexpectedly asked, - about whom Radio Liberty talked about as an organizer of anti-Semitic and nationalist organizations under the roof of the KGB?

"I am a major, not a colonel," Kumanin corrected him, "do you often listen to Svoboda?"

- Is it forbidden? Theophilus asked.

"Of course not," Kumanin replied, "but it testifies to many things. About moral character, for example, about a hostile attitude towards all the values of our society. You know this radio station is the mouthpiece of the CIA.

"Nevertheless," Theophilus remarked, "I want to take this opportunity and warn you that you are engaged in a dangerous business - you are ruining the country. Do you understand it?"

"Just don't teach us," Kumanin was indignant, "and there's no need to worry about the country. You look very little like a patriot, sorry for being direct. I do not intend to discuss such matters with you at all. If I haven't handed you over to the police yet, it's only because, just like you, I want to find Nadya Shestakova. Therefore, I would like to learn more about her activities and clarify the issue with this boy, Alyosha Lisitsyn. Can you explain this phenomenon more or less clearly to me? Theophilus was silent for a while.

"I'm afraid you won't understand," he finally said.

- And you popularly tell - Kumanin settled down on a hard stool. - Tell me, I'll listen. Whether I understand or not, we'll see.

— Do you believe in God? asked Theophilus unexpectedly. But why do I ask. Of course no. This is contrary to the moral character of the builder ...

"Don't play around," Kumanin interrupted him, "what does it matter whether I believe in God or

no, because I asked a question about a child prodigy?

"Decisive," Theophilus objected. "It is one thing to consider a person as a Divine creation, another thing is to look at him as an evolved animal that appeared as a result of a mutation of lobe-finned fish. Have you ever read the Bible, at least on duty?"

"I considered it unnecessary to fill my head with Jewish myths," Kumanin admitted. - Myths are myths. They cannot be taken seriously. Almost none of the provisions of the Bible is confirmed by either historical science or archeology.

"If we consider the Bible as a historical chronicle, perhaps," Theophilus agreed, "but if we consider this Book as a collection of advice and warnings, then its significance can hardly be overestimated.

"For example," Kumanin asked.

"For example, let's take the legend of the Tower of Babel," continued Theophilus. - It is foolish to consider it from the point of view of its historical reliability. Was this tower actually built or not? Who is interested? Another thing is important: this legend is a warning from the Lord. He tells us: "Don't build a tower to the sky, you will never build it. If you persist, you will cease to understand each other, rise up against each other, your tower will collapse and bury everyone under its ruins. Now look what the construction of your tower to Heaven has led to: we are both Russians, almost the same age, we seem to speak the same language, but we no longer understand each other. And the tower is already dangerously staggering and is about to collapse.

"You haven't read the Bible, but you've heard enough of Svoboda," Sergey muttered, remembering that Theophilus is registered in a psychiatric dispensary.

- Or, - not listening to him, Theophilus continued, - take the book "Esther", which describes the history of the Babylonian captivity of the Jews. You probably know her. It seems that one of the organizations subordinate to you even issued a special brochure, where, on the basis of this particular biblical text, the cruelty and treachery of the Jews is proved.

- Do you, of course, have a different interpretation? Kumanin asked tiredly, who was already rather tired of this whole empty discussion. - In your opinion, the Jews are innocent victims. By the way, they crucified your Christ, and you pity them.

"I do not pity them, but our country," Theophilus objected, "the book of Esther does not divide anyone into victims and executioners. She warns: do not mess with Jews. Any fight against them will end with you killing each other and destroying your own country. There have already been many examples of this in history, from the Roman and Spanish empires to Russia and Germany, and you are again trying to step on the same rake.

"You're talking about the same thing again," Kumanin said displeasedly. "You don't want to say that the Soviet Union will fall apart because we are consistently fighting Zionism as a form of racial discrimination condemned by a UN decision.

- I'm just sure of it, - answered Theophilus, - especially after the Lord struck the Chernobyl bell and the star fell into Wormwood.

- Are you registered in a psychiatric clinic? Kumanin asked.

"At your suggestion," Theophilus answered angrily, "after I was sent to

compulsory treatment in a psychiatric hospital.

"And they did the right thing," Kumanin said harshly. "Your reasoning is not so much dangerous as insane. OK. You again took the conversation somewhere to the side ...

"Have you ever thought," Theophilus interrupted him, "that some kind of enemy special service has penetrated your ranks and with your own hands, having driven our country into the Middle Ages, is now finally destroying it?"

"Listen," Kumanin cut him off, "I already told you that I don't intend to discuss such questions. I think you need to go back to treatment, I can take care of that. And please, no more touching on global issues. I did not come here at all to listen to your arguments about saving the motherland. Trust me, I've heard enough of them. We talked about Alyosha Lisitsyn, and you wanted to tell me what you know about this fact.

- I'm trying to explain, - answered Theophilus, - but you somehow painfully react to my every word. If you want to understand the phenomenon of this boy, then be patient, listen to me and try to understand at least something.

"Very well," Kumanin agreed, "speak up."

"If you read the Bible," continued Theophilus, "you would know that when the Lord created man, the world was already inhabited by rational beings.

"And he carried similar things to students at lectures," thought Kumanin, "what a horror!" But he restrained himself and asked:

- And what follows from this?

"And it follows," answered Theophilus, "that man is neither the only nor the highest representative of intelligent life ...

"Excuse me," Kumanin said, "but this is pure fantasy. Of course, it can be assumed that somewhere in space, on distant stars, there are civilizations ... significantly superior in development to ours, human.

"But I'm not talking about that," Theophilus objected, "not about space. I am talking about our small Earth, on which man is not a representative of the highest form of intelligent life...

- And by whom? - Kumanin decided to endure everything to the end.

"He is one of the forms of intelligent life," Theophilus explained with the patience of a professional teacher, "one of the forms, and not the only one, and by no means the highest.

What is this higher form? Kumanin asked. "Ants, fish, or maybe flowers?"

- In the original Bible, - continue to enlighten Feofil Kumanin, - there is such a concept "hoel", which means in Hebrew - "the invisible world around us", inhabited by spirits, angels and demons. Since orthodox science has never seriously considered such questions, one has to use religious or mythological terminology. The ancients, however, knew about the existence of this world and quite often came into contact with its inhabitants, who can be conditionally called "ultra-creatures". When translating Bible texts from Hebrew and Aramaic into

Greek and Latin, a huge number of errors were made, mainly due to the lack of adequate concepts in the Greek-Latin dictionary and, of course, due to some difference in the worldview of Jews and medieval Christian philosophers. As a result, many mistakes were made in the translation of the Bible; by the middle of the 16th century, more than eight hundred discrepancies had already been discovered. In particular, the Hebrew word "hoel" became "hell", which means "Hell". The original meaning of the texts has been lost. Gradually, information about the invisible world that surrounds us, and about its inhabitants began to fade, then disappear, individual facts received a primitive church interpretation or a purely materialistic one, which is even worse. Meanwhile, there is a lot of evidence that our world, let's call it "visible", and the other, "invisible", world is connected by numerous channels, since we are they, but at a lower stage of development. Therefore, "they" are closely watching us and, to the best of their ability, try to reason and warn against mistakes. However, communication is very complex and unreliable.

Why? Kumanin was surprised. "If the ultra-creatures are so cool, then what does it cost them to destroy our world?" Since they are smarter than us.

"Excuse me, Major," Feofil put in, "you have a very primitive way of thinking: if it's stronger, then you have to conquer and destroy it?" Fortunately, not everyone thinks so. You could, for example, destroy all the ants, but you do not do this, on the contrary, you protect them. There is nothing else you can do with one ant other than brutal violence. Do we have a way to give him some information and get a response from him? I believe that we are still more animals than rational beings, and "ultra-beings" have long developed procedures for transmitting information to us. One method is the use of so-called mediums. You have probably heard of séances.

"What nonsense!" Kumanin thought, but said nothing.

"Most often, mediums," continued Theophilus, "are children. These "mediums" are divided into two categories: the first ones work as loudspeakers, that is, information is transmitted through them, the second ones are more complex, since they store all the information about the past, present and future of our civilization. They involve those brain cells that the vast majority of people sleep. A breakthrough to these cells and the possibility of their activation would be a scientific discovery of the greatest importance, capable of completely changing the nature of man. Nadya Shestakova, as far as I know, was already on the verge of such a discovery. Never before has a child-medium been subjected to such thorough scientific research. He either fell into the hands of the church, like Lucia of Fatima, or into the hands of rude ignoramuses, like Hauser, or into the hands of show business dealers, like Jack Lee. Alyosha is now in the KGB, where he will probably die.

"So you think that Alyosha Lisitsyn," began Kumanin, who had a headache from all these conversations, "this boy whom you and Nadya investigated ..."

"It's very difficult with him," Theophilus interrupted him. "I have never been able to determine exactly what category of mediums he belongs to and where he came from. It happens that a child is abducted at the moment of birth, and then he suddenly appears, as if from nowhere ..."

"I am listening to you," Kumanin sighed, "and I never cease to be surprised. An adult, educated, well-read, but you carry this. Do you yourself believe in what you say?"

Theophilus shook his head sadly.

"I told you that you wouldn't understand anything. With your worldview, this is really very difficult to understand, even impossible. But you heard one of the tapes, and Nadia told you something. How do you explain all this yourself?"

Kumanin shrugged.

Some kind of hypnosis. Psychotropic drugs. I don't know, but I'm sure that there is a simple explanation for everything, without any religious nonsense and mysticism.

- And why are your colleagues so alarmed? Theophilus asked, "why did they take Alyosha from the boarding school and where are they hiding now?"

"I don't know," Kumanin admitted. "I just don't know why they needed him.

"So I'll tell you," Theophilus's voice rang out with excitement. You haven't listened to all the tapes. He said such things from which everyone there simply had to alarm.

— What did he say? Kumanin was surprised. What could a five-year-old say to cause such a stir?

"I don't want to repeat this," said Theophilus, "especially to you. You react so painfully to everything. I can only say that he made several predictions, for which in our country it is quite possible to get a full-fledged camp term. And he did it in a boarding school in the presence of staff. Of course, there was a rumor, and maybe a "knock", after which everything happened. I just
I think.

Where did Nadia disappear to? Does it fit into your theory somehow? Kumanin asked.

- Nadia was for Alyosha, who came from nowhere, in fact, a mother. He became madly attached to her. When it fell into the hands of your colleagues, they were in a foolish position, no one was able to handle it. Apparently, he demanded that Nadia continue to be next to him, and his demand was fulfilled ...

- Required? Kumanin was surprised.

"Well, I asked, if you like," Theophilus shrugged his shoulders. "Although I think it was a requirement. "Do not believe, do not be afraid, do not ask" - it is pointless to ask you for anything, and you fulfill the requirements quickly.

Theophilus quoted Solzhenitsyn, apparently in order to provoke another fit of rage in Kumanin. But he was mistaken, because he did not read Solzhenitsyn and was thinking about something completely different.

"So you think," he said, "that she was simply arrested on the street?"

"I don't think so," replied Theophilus. - They called her, probably, and explained the situation. In other words, she was trusted, and she agreed. After all, Nadia is a Soviet person, like all of us.

- Agreed? Kumanin asked. "Without informing your parents?" Something is unbelievable.

"There are options here," Feofil said. - It may very well be that she was promised that she would return home in the evening, or asked to bring some things for the boy, medicine or something like that. And then either they detained him, or Alyosha did not let him go, or she herself did not want to leave without him. Why didn't you call? Here, too, different explanations are possible. It is possible that the boy, having fallen into your hands, immediately fell ill or imitated the disease. Only two days have passed since the disappearance of Nadia. I'm sure she'll make herself known one way or another, you'll see.

"It all seems like a fairy tale to me," Kumanin admitted, "at first, I must admit, I simply considered you crazy with small-minded inclinations. Now I see that you are very

a capable psychoanalyst, albeit with a twist. Some of what you have told me also matches my own information. I'm starting to think you're right about Nadia. But Alyosha Lisitsyn ... It does not happen that people appear from nowhere. He was found in Rostov the Great at a bus stop. I'm not too lazy and I'll go there and, I assure you, I'll find out a lot: where did he come from, why, and who left him at this stop.

"By the way," Feofil asked, "does this boy's face remind you of anyone?"

"Yes," agreed Kumanin, "it always seems to me that I have already seen this face somewhere, but I cannot figure out where.

"He is very similar to the late Tsarevich Alexei Nikolaevich," Theophilus remarked. - Don't you find it?

The face of Tsarevich Alexei, son of Nicholas II, Kumanin saw the day before on the cover of a book by Charles Gibbs, but it did not evoke any associations in him.

"No, I don't find it," he said to Theophilus.

Theophilus got up, went to the bookshelves and pulled out a photographic reproduction depicting a five-year-old prince in the arms of a sailor uncle. The prince was dressed in a sailor suit, on his head was a peakless cap with the inscription on the ribbon: "Standard". He put the picture on the table in front of Kumanin, and next to it was the already familiar photograph of Nadya with Alyosha in her arms.

"Of course, these are different people," the ex-psychiatrist said in such a tone as if Tsarevich Alexei, if he were alive, would now, in 1989, not be eighty-five years old, but five. - Alyosha is much lighter, he has a different oval of the face. But pay attention to the nose, a very characteristic cut of the eyes and, most importantly, the lips. Agree, the similarity is obvious.

"Stop it," Kumanin grimaced painfully. "I already have a headache from your fantasies. Now I understand why you weren't imprisoned under Andropov, but sent to be treated. I would do exactly the same...

But suddenly, either under the influence of the currents emanating from Theophilus, or from their conversation, Kumanin saw a similarity between Alyosha Lisitsyn in the arms of Nadia Shestakova and Tsarevich Alexei in the arms of his uncle. Kumanin decided that he had had enough. He looked at his watch. It was two in the afternoon. I had to return to Moscow.

"All right," he said, "it's time to go."

- Should I follow you? Theophilus asked.

"Not yet," said Kumanin, "when I need you, I will find you." Write down my phone. If there is anything new about Nadia, call. Where can I call from here?

"From the post office," Theophilus said with a sense of relief, "it's true, it's not always possible to get through on the phone.

- Try, - Kumanin stood up and headed for the exit. Already approaching the car, he asked Theophilus:

- Who was my namesake, after whom the local almshouse is named? They say that the village had the same name before the revolution?

- The Serpukhov merchant, - answered Theophilus, - was very rich, drove steamers along the Volga, traded in salt and fish. In many surrounding villages he built churches, almshouses and schools. But

he lived permanently in Serpukhov itself, where there was also a Kumanin pier. Now there is no pier there for a long time. And not far from here he had a dacha - a chic three-story mansion with columns. I saw a photo in one of the old magazines, Capital and Manor, I think. When you came here from Moscow, you probably paid attention to the road going to the right, where the traffic police post is. This is the road to the mansion.

- Did he survive? Kumanin was surprised.

Theophilus shrugged.

- Don't know. There has been some kind of top-secret institute since pre-war times, and no one is allowed in there. There was a rumor that some kind of invisible rays were being invented there to shoot down planes. Perhaps the mansion survived, but in a rebuilt form.

- And what happened to this Kumanin then, is it known?

"They drowned me in the Oka together with my grandfather," answered Theophilus.

Getting into the car, Kumanin asked the last question:

- And what was the name of this Kumanin? Do not know?

"I don't know," Theophilus admitted. "Mother might know. I'll clarify if you're interested. Perhaps a relative?"

Kumanin, did not answer, revved up and drove along the road in the direction of the Kumanin almshouse.

III

Even at the entrance to Pimenov's house, Sergei thought that it would be necessary to pour water into the radiator of the car. But the psycho-psychiatrist so confused his head with his biblical-mystical reasoning that he forgot about it. Kumanin had already passed the traffic police post on the mysterious forest road leading, as it was possible to find out, to the former mansion of the merchant Kumanin, when the temperature light flashed alarmingly, announcing that further driving would destroy the engine. Sergei swore, stopped the car and went out onto the road. Pulling on a rough work glove, he removed the radiator cap, and steam poured out from there, as if from a burst pipe of a heating plant. He looked around. On the left side of the road there was a forest. The heat of recent days has dried up all the roadside ditches. The nearest river, where it was possible to draw water, was still seven kilometers away. However, on the right, the forest was already receding about five hundred meters from the road, and on a gentle slope a small house was nestled, sunk in the greenery of young pine trees growing around. There was no choice. Taking a bucket out of the trunk and locking the car, Kumanin went across the field to this house. Climbing up the hillside, he saw below several dozen roofs of some village.

Near the house he approached, an old woman was dozing on a bench, her weary hands resting on her knees. When Kumanin appeared, she opened her eyes and without any fear asked:

- What do you want, son?

"Excuse me, mother," Sergey said, holding up an empty bucket in front of him as proof of peaceful intentions. - Can you fill the car with water somewhere?

The old woman rose heavily from the bench.

"The trouble is with the water," she said plaintively. - Until you reach the column -

tormented. I can't train, but my son comes from Moscow once a year, according to a promise, I can't water the beds, or wash, or cook dinner. The barrel will soon dry out altogether ...

- Where is the column? Kumanin asked.

- Now I'll call my granddaughter, he will show. "Deniska, take this uncle to the pump," the grandmother called to her grandson.

A boy of ten years old appeared from somewhere, showing his readiness to serve as a guide with all his appearance.

"Son," the old woman turned to Kumanin. "You could bring me some water in a barrel, would you?" And I'll treat you with milk and strawberries. And then I completely disappear. I'll give you a yoke and two large buckets. You'll do three walks, and that's fine. I'm almost eighty. I'm afraid I'll die dragging.

Kumanin glanced at his watch and agreed. By and large, there was nothing to do in Moscow, and he had not tried garden strawberries for a long time.

The column turned out to be two hundred meters from the house. Accompanied by Deniska, Kumanin made three walks and, to the lamentations of Baba Dusi (the old woman's name was Evdokia Nikiforovna), filled the barrel with water almost to the brim. After that, the old woman invited him to the house to taste the promised milk with strawberries. This was very helpful, since Sergei, as always, grabbed a glass of kefir in the morning, and it was already four hours. Entering the house, the first thing Kumanin noticed was a large photograph of a man in a tunic with three cubes on his buttonholes, hanging on the wall. His tunic was decorated with the badge "Voroshilovsky shooter" and "20 years of the NKVD" in the form of a traditional shield and ball. Taking a closer look, Kumanin realized that this photograph was from some small original, apparently preserved on old documents.

Baba Dusya noticed with what curiosity Kumanin examined the photo on the wall and, sighing, explained:

My husband is Vanya. As in the fortieth year he disappeared, so not a rumor or a spirit.

- In the Finnish war? Kumanin asked.

- What is there in the war! Grandma waved. - If at war, it would be understandable. And here he served, nearby, in protection. Here, not far away in the forest, where the police are now standing, the road goes to the dacha of some former bourgeois. There he served as a guard.

- And what was at that dacha, - asked Kumanin, - what was he guarding?

- And the jester knows him, - said the grandmother, - he never said, but I didn't really ask. He guarded some secrets, then, just before the New Year in the fortieth, some boss died. He was buried nearby here, in the old monastic cemetery, since then I have not seen my Vanya. Many people from the village who served there disappeared then. They thought they were transferred to where. I also went to Moscow, fussed about where to go with my children - no money, no certificate. Nobody knew anything. And there the war began. It was only after her that she secured a small pension and received a certificate for Vanya: "He died in the line of duty" - that's how it is written.

What kind of boss died? Kumanin asked, enjoying fresh strawberries.

"But the jester knows him," Baba Dusya answered, "some kind of colonel." They said the last name, but I forgot.

- Not Lisitsyn by chance? Kumanin choked on milk from his guess.

- No, - said the old woman, - not Lisitsyn, I knew Lisitsyn, he was a major. There was a big boss there, some kind of colonel, he showed up in our village a couple of times, after that Lisitsyn disappeared, and Vanya was mine, and that's all. They wanted to evict me and my children, but then the war with the German began, and they forgot, and after the war they gave me a pension ...

Kumanin felt his heart pounding. This means that the old dacha of the long-dead Serpukhov merchant Kumanin is object 17! And this object still exists, since there is such protection. He forgot about milk and strawberries, trying to stop shaking, he asked:

- Where is the cemetery? Where was this colonel buried?

"Seven kilometers from here. There used to be a skete and a cemetery next to it. There he was buried. There was a rumor that they were shot for something. That is why they were buried.

- Is it possible to drive there by car somehow? Kumanin asked.

"You can drive up," said the old woman. - You will drive another four kilometers to Moscow, and there the country road will go to the right. Here it is for another three kilometers, and then it's not far on foot. Only they won't let you in, my dear.

- Why so? Kumanin finished his milk and wiped his lips with a handkerchief.

- The military unit is standing, everyone is entangled with a thorn. Our women want to go there for mushrooms and for cranberries in the fall. When nothing, but when caught and fined. There are some evil passions... Yes, and overgrown there, go, everything. The chapel should stand, since it has not been demolished. So beautiful...

— Have you been there yourself? Kumanin asked.

"I also went with my husband," the grandmother sighed, "for a long time. He showed me the chapel. Haven't been since.

Thanking Baba Dusya for the treat, Kumanin began to go down to the highway with a bucket of water.

Chapter 7

I

General Klimov liked to drive a car, although it was very rare to do so. Unquestioning instructions for the entire dignitary elite of the USSR categorically forbade some small liberties, for example, to appear anywhere without protection, use public transport, and even more so walk around the city or other places, excluding special zones around protected special dachas and nature reserves. It was not allowed to live where you wanted, except for specially designated areas, and, of course, to drive a car. Even Brezhnev, who loved to drive, had to eventually obey these strict requirements.

Earlier, when Klimov was a colonel, he felt much more at ease - he could appear anywhere and with anyone, enthusiastically race around Moscow in his personal Volga, go to the dacha, even while drunk. The general's epaulettes, received from the hands of Yuri Andropov, immediately turned for him into something like cast-iron fetters. It's good that with the death of Konstantin Chernenko, the harsh party-nomenklatura protocol became

to be forgotten, however, not so much that one could finally feel, if not free, then at least independent, and, as the wits used to say, to go to the toilet on their own, without taking a messenger or adjutant with them to flush the water. Fortunately, Klimov was still a KGB general, and not a secretary of the Central Committee (he was not even a member of the Central Committee), and therefore he could afford small liberties, referring to the secrecy of this or that event.

Now, driving the rented Peugeot through the streets of Paris, the general felt pleasure and deliberately took a detour in order to prolong it. He was sure that there was no tail behind him, at least not his own. "If the French or any other Western intelligence service seized on him, let them know that he is subject to vices, like most of the human race." In accordance with Western thinking (in principle, quite logical), a KGB general is simply obliged to possess all human vices, from sadism to sodomy. Of course, he could be followed by idiots from the so-called Z group, closed, according to Gorbachev, directly to him. They mainly follow the secretary general's inner circle, but they have to receive their pay at the Lubyanka, although their personal files (for the purpose of secrecy) are kept in the Administration of the Central Committee. And who pays, he orders the music. Therefore, all their ardor is aimed at spying on the members of the Politburo and its apparatus. But if he, Viktor Ivanovich Klimov, notices that he is being followed, then at the signal "vacuum" - they know about it - any of them can disappear from the face of the Earth. "Suppose someone from the group has time to report to Gorbachev about him, it's not scary either. Firstly, Gorbachev (albeit partially) is aware of the matter, and secondly, having learned that Klimov really went to the third-rate Admiral Courbet Hotel, and did not buy Louis XV diamond cufflinks at the Lignier antique store, he will wait for his own report. .

Hotel "Admiral Courbet" was located in the most unpretentious area of the French capital near the river port. This shabby three-story building, built during the Third Republic, was the headquarters of the river police in the old days. After the end of the Second World War, it was bought by a certain Francois Guicault - a rather strange person, gravitating towards Marxism and alcoholism at the same time. According to Giko's plan, in the building of the former river police, it was supposed to create something like an almshouse for alcoholics, with which the area adjacent to the port was teeming with. However, the lack of funds, as always happens, did not allow him to fully implement the plan. Instead of an almshouse, a round-the-clock tavern and an underground brothel were opened here, with the help of which Giko tried to somehow make ends meet.

After the death of the entrepreneur, the building at an auction (it was auctioned off for the debts of the owner) was bought by dark personalities who wished to remain anonymous. The newspaper "Humanite", to which Giko bequeathed this house, sued the anonymous people, but lost the process, since the will of the deceased had long been protested by his creditors. Since then, the Admiral Courbet Hotel has existed here, which has a very notorious reputation as a haven for alcoholics and homosexuals. There were all sorts of rumors about the institution, but the police and the prefect remained calm about this. The public opinion of a democratic state was apparently not up to him, since no one had ever applied to the court against the new owners of the Admiral Courbet Hotel. The sight of luxurious limousines, which from time to time drove up to the hotel and drove away from it, did not add respectability to the institution, but only surrounded it with an aura of some mystery ...

In the dimly lit hall, under a painting in which Admiral Courbet, holding a spyglass under his arm, drank a bottle of rum from the neck against the backdrop of shrouds and other romance of the sailing and steam fleet, sat at the porter's desk and read, to Klimov's surprise, the Defense Revue magazine on English language. This fact, like a short haircut, and also protruding ears, was distinguished in the porter of a retired military man with the rank of senior sergeant, no lower. Therefore, Klimov decided to be brief in a military way.

"Paul Julien from room 207 is waiting for me," he said. "I would like to go up there.

Klimov spoke in English, reasoning that if the porter reads a magazine in English, then he must be familiar with it. In addition, the general spoke French poorly. When necessary, he was served by a dozen translators, both his own and Gorbachev's. Perhaps the porter could read English, but he spoke about the same as Klimov spoke French.

"If you are Monsieur Martin," he said carefully, "then Monsieur Julien is waiting for you."

The general had already put his foot on the first step of the stairs, when the porter again addressed him in some mixture of non-existent Anglo-French dialect, quite, however, understandable.

"One moment, monsieur. Visitors are required to pay to visit. Our establishment is special, and only police officers are allowed to enter it free of charge in certain specific cases ...

— Is that how? Klimov was surprised. - And how much should a visitor who is not a client pay?

"A real trifle, monsieur," the porter sighed. "Only fifty dollars.

- Are you crazy? Klimov asked. - Where do I get such money from?

"I don't know, monsieur," said the retired sergeant, getting up, "but there are establishments for poor people. Ours has a reputation for denying poverty and charity. He who enters us cannot be burdened with these two vices...

"I think," Klimov found himself, "that Mr. Julien will contribute this money for me, since he invited me ...

"It's impossible," the porter sighed again, "even if Monsieur Julien wanted to do it, we could not accept his contribution, because he is our client. The rules are very strict and not introduced today, believe me.

"So," the general said, somewhat bewildered, "if I don't pay fifty dollars, they won't let me in at all?"

"I'm afraid that's just the way it is," the porter made a sad face. "It appears that this is the first time you have had the honor of visiting our establishment. Otherwise, I would not have been so patient in explaining our rules.

- Is a credit card okay? Klimov lost his patience, reaching into his jacket pocket.

"Cash only," the porter explained much more emotionally, "because..."

Klimov threw a fifty-dollar bill on the counter:

"Choke," he said in Russian.

- Sorry? the porter didn't understand.

- I say, - switched to English Klimov, - that you have orders, like in a good aristocratic club.

"We are the club," the porter agreed, "with the only difference being that we don't take entry fees. We only have one-offs.

Klimov decided that enough was enough and went up to the second floor. A charter hung on the landing, written in large red letters in French and English, warning that suicide was one of the most serious mortal sins that could not be forgiven.

The charter of the club, about which the porter spoke, forbade locking the doors of the rooms, which Klimov was convinced of by finding the door of room 207 open. He went inside.

The floor of the room was covered with colored linoleum, wet footprints of bare feet, apparently, led from the bath. At a table in the middle of the room, against the backdrop of a barred window, sat a man in a Marengo-colored terrycloth robe, his chin resting on the palm of his left hand. In his right he held a bottle, on the label of which Admiral Courbet was depicted with the same bottle in his left hand and a boarding cleaver in his right. Nearby was a plate of cauliflower sprinkled with some sort of brown abomination. On the wall was the same poster as on the landing, warning of the deadly sin of suicide.

"Hello," said Klimov, hanging his hat on a nail under the poster.

Instead of answering, the guest of the room kissed the neck of the bottle and took a valiant sip. Putting the bottle on the table, but without letting go of it, the man asked in Russian:

- What is the date today?

"July 21st," Klimov answered, looking around for another chair. There was no chair, and the general sat down on the edge of the bed, reminiscent of the bed of a monk who decided to fight his way to heaven by mortifying the flesh.

— 21st? - the owner of the dressing gown asked, - How quickly time flies. I have a plane tomorrow. I'm glad you came, otherwise I wouldn't have remembered.

And he took another sip from the bottle.

— Where is Sasha? Klimov asked.

"Dead," replied Admiral Courbet's admirer, finally lowering the bottle to take a plate of cauliflower and sniff it.

- Was it necessary? Klimov sighed.

"I don't know," his interlocutor grimaced, pushing his plate back in disgust. - As your Lenin said - it is better to shoot a hundred thousand people more than one less.

"It was not Lenin who said it, but Himmler," Klimov corrected.

- What's the difference - hiccuped unknown. - I'm sorry. He looked at Klimov with completely non-drunk gray eyes.

"I'm tired of you, Klimov," he said, "I'm tired of you back in Moscow. Why did you come here to check on me? Go and make sure: the corpse is lying in the next room, unless, of course, it was taken away. Then look in the Seine. Suicide is the gravest sin, the man laughed drunkenly,

Klimov winced. He did not like licentiousness. What the man registered with the porter as Paul Julien said might have been witty, but he shouldn't have laughed, especially at the dead man.

"All right, Julien," said the general, "our work requires a lot of nervous tension, and everyone relieves it in their own way. I have no fundamental objections...

"You're saying something at length," the one who was called Julien grumbled, "like at a party meeting," and repeated: "Suicide is a sin."

"I am an atheist," Klimov laughed, "and I don't believe in nonsense. Such maxims could have fooled the head of the late Andropov, God rest his soul. I have already committed suicide twice, after which I was promoted both times ...

"No one argues," Paul agreed, "you are a unique specimen, something like a blossoming linden sticking out of the toilet drain pipe.

"There are so many fertilizers," Klimov cheered even more, "that I myself wonder why nothing grows in the toilet bowls. But listen to me carefully..." Klimov stammered and added, "Pol. I deliberately decided to intercept you on the way home to warn you that our entire agreed schedule is going to hell. Not very clear acceleration processes have begun, it seems that the wheel is being launched from the mountain ...

"It's okay," Paul chuckled. - Come up with some new slogan, for example, "Acceleration-90."

"It's already been invented," Klimov remarked, "for ten years ahead, it should work. It's not about us, but about the fact that global processes are accelerating. The wall may collapse as early as the end of this year, somewhere in November or December. And the dominoes will begin.

Paul looked at Klimov with interest and handed him a bottle:

- Do you want a drink?

Klimov silently accepted the bottle, took out a collapsible telescopic cup from his jacket pocket, poured rum into it, drank it and poured it again.

- Courbet absolutely in vain went to the admirals. He would have become more famous if he had thought to patent his rum recipe. And drank the second glass.

- On these ruins, - continued Klimov, eating rum with a coffee bean mined in some other pocket, - a powerful western grouping of troops will remain. Are you afraid, Paul?

"You must be scared," Paul said, pulling a new bottle from under the table, "because this is your group. And since she no longer has a way forward, she can become capricious, not wanting to go back home. Then you will have to establish mechanisms of influence there, market ones, I guess. The generals will privatize all the armaments, drive them away, and certainly become not as ferocious as in the days of developed socialism. Rich people are not aggressive. The leaders understood this very well, therefore they tried to drive everyone into poverty and turn them into frozen cannon fodder ...

"Listen," Klimov interrupted him, "do you want me to ask for the position of Gorbachev's deputy for ideology for you?"

"No," Paul shook his head, "no need. Your pay is low. I, Klimov, get more per week than you do per year, although I am not a general.

And he took another sip of the bottle.

"This is the whole essence of Gorbachev's perestroika," Klimov remarked philosophically,

— so we can get more in a day than you, Mike, in a lifetime.

- Highly commendable, - answered the one whom Klimov this time called Mike. When people set high goals for themselves, they always succeed, believe me. But for the next five to ten years, you will have to sweat a lot. It's not scary to work if the work is well paid, isn't it?

"Holy truth," Klimov confirmed. He was silent for a while, apparently thinking about something. Paul-Mike, with his chin resting on the hands of both hands, was sitting; looking somewhere into eternity, like Grandmother Fedosya in Russian folk tales.

"Listen," Klimov asked unexpectedly, "what would you say if Russia became a monarchy?" Semi-constitutional, shall we say.

"You got me today," Paul replied, looking in disgust at the dish of cauliflower. Has Gorbachev set his sights on emperors yet?

— What about Gorbachev? Klimov reacted with displeasure. — I have a more legitimate claimant.

Paul lifted his head with some effort.

- Who it? he asked with frank interest, "not this one, in France?" How is it? Kirill...

"Vladimir Kirillovich," Klimov prompted. Paul tried to get up, while shaking the table so that

the bottle fell to the floor, but did not break, only a little rum leaked onto the linoleum.

- What are you? asked Klimov, picking up the bottle and pulling out his glass again.

Paul sank heavily into his chair again.

"I want to note," he began, looking with displeasure as Klimov poured rum into his glass, "that this guy has no rights to the throne. Even Nicholas II took them away from his dad for immoral behavior. I read recently in some newspaper. Listen, General, why did you decide that I should give you such expensive rum to drink for free?

"Calm down," advised Klimov, drinking a glass and pouring another one. — I paid fifty dollars at the entrance.

"Then excuse me," said Paul, holding out his hand for the bottle. "So you have someone else in mind?"

"Yes," Klimov confirmed, "a direct descendant.

"Interesting." Paul even put the bottle on the table. "I remember once reading an old report about how our agent Fox arrived in Yekaterinburg and took your tsar somewhere...

- Was Fox your agent, - Klimov was surprised, - and not a German one?

— German? Paul asked with obvious disdain in his voice. - Do the Germans know how to do anything, except for "march-march-march"? Their only intelligence achievement during the two world wars was the purchase of Lenin for a relatively modest amount, and even that turned out to be sideways to them in the end. We really had the practice then to infiltrate our agents east through Germany, so you could well take him for

German. In Russia, in general, it has always been simple: whoever is not Russian is either a German, or a Jew, or a Tatar.

"In those years, it seems that you didn't have any intelligence at all," Klimov reminded, "how could you carry out such complex operations?"

"There was," Paul disagreed, stretching sweetly. "Still, it's wonderful to spend two days in this blessed place, you relieve the stress of a whole year and recharge yourself mentally for another year ahead. And you, Klimov, how do you relieve tension?"

"I'm shooting crows at Zavidovo," the general laughed, "from an Uzi submachine gun."

"And those under investigation in the Lubyanka basements," Julien added.

"You're exaggerating," Klimov said modestly, "and you're confusing work with rest."

"Actually," Paul smiled, "I somehow didn't think about it. So what were we talking about?"

"About that," Klimov reminded, "that you had intelligence even before the First World War."

"Yes," Paul nodded his head. - It was even better than now, because it was still completely unbureaucratized, so to speak. This is the trouble with your and German intelligence services, and even that they have always been too militarized. This is good in wartime when determining enemy forces on the other side of the river, but it is completely unsuitable in our operations, as you have probably already been able to verify. From my point of view, intelligence should not have any sign at all. CIA, KGB, GRU, Mossad - these are all political thrillers. Real intelligence, if it can't live without a sign, should be content with something neutral, like "The Benevolent Society of Widows in the Name of Christ the Savior" or "Wholesale Canned Fruit." Do you catch my thought, Klimov?

"Partially," the general muttered.

"Of course," Paul continued, "if there is no democracy in the country and the secret service spends all its strength on a war against its own people, then epaulettes and belts and fiercely loud signs like "Death to spies!" Are necessary.

"Mike," Klimov said plaintively, "I'm already tired of political studies about the stupidity of totalitarianism, have pity on me. I didn't graduate from Yale. Do you know what a check is? This is the Extraordinary Commission for Combating Counter-Revolution and Sabotage, something like your Committees of Vigilance during the development of the Far West, when any boss could almost sentence fifty people to immediate hanging. You went through this in the 19th century, and we are going through it now, lagged behind because of the Tatar yoke. So, I am a Chekist, so I do not need to retell my master's thesis. I read it when you were still fighting in Vietnam. Let's go back to Fox. Do you know anything else about him?"

"Excuse me, my general," replied Mike-Paul, "when I talk to you, it always seems to me that you will not understand me unless I first read at least the introduction from my school essay on the topic "The owners of department stores are the basis of combat the power of democracy." Especially about Fox. To use your terminology, he was a treasure hunter. He owned a little shop somewhere on the West Coast, doing small financial transactions and the like, but he was always interested in treasures. Not gold veins somewhere in Alaska and California, but treasures. He began, if I'm not mistaken, traditionally: with the search for the treasures of Flint or Morgan, I don't remember exactly. Whether it was successful in any way, I don't know. But here, they say, he

I came across some pamphlet stating that in terms of the number of buried and walled up treasures, Russia ranks first in the world, walking by a huge margin from all steel countries combined, like the Chicago Rangers in basketball. The idea to go to Russia in search of treasures, in comparison with which all the legendary treasures of pirates looked like miserable coppers, captured him so much that he decided to go there in the midst of the First World War. He had his own special concept in this regard. Like, there is nothing worse than jewels and gold coins hidden somewhere, since all these values should work for the economy of mankind, and not lie in shit for centuries without any benefit. He came to the conclusion that your country has always been poor because everyone preferred to bury their valuables in the ground for fear of being confiscated, rather than put them into circulation in the name of the public good. So, he decided to go to Russia. You, Klimov, probably know how it is done here in the States, when some store owner, bank clerk, stockbroker or unsuccessful writer is captured by the obsession with becoming an adventurer? They go to the State Department first because they don't want to be jailed or simply shot on their first contact with the local authorities in some exotic country like yours.

Klimov allowed himself a grimace of displeasure, but listened attentively.

"At the State Department," continued Paul, looking at the empty bottle of "Admiral Courbet" into the light, "they are given a passport, which, although it did not cause such a reverent attitude towards itself in those days as it does now, was still sufficient insurance against the arbitrariness of the natives." I heard that even Lenin and Dzerzhinsky respected the American passport, since they had one in their safes in case they had to flee Russia in a hurry.

"Don't be distracted, please," Klimov asked, looking at his watch.

- Well, - agreed Julien, - but before issuing a passport, the State Department conducted an interview and unobtrusively asked the newly-minted conquistador to work a little for the government. In exchange, he received the opportunity, if necessary, to take refuge in some American consulate or mission. Sometimes these people got more information than specially trained agents. And then Uncle Sam, for the sake of their well-being, was ready to send a squadron of battleships and a division of marines across the whole wide world. Without suspecting it, it was they who laid the concept of the activities of intelligence institutions, but this happened much later.

Paul looked at the bottle again.

"Everything beautiful in the world comes to an end," he said with a sigh and asked:

- What time is it now?

"Half past eight," Klimov said without looking at his watch.

- Mother of God! Paul exclaimed. "I was supposed to be at the embassy an hour ago. I will be fired from my job because of you, Klimov. Are you in a car? Take me to..."

"I haven't lost my mind yet," Klimov answered, "to take you around Paris. Washington will not send a division of Marines to save me.

"You're probably right," Paul agreed. — I'll go on foot, I'll get some air. But where did these bastards go?

At that moment, the door of the room opened and a huge Arab brought in a tray with steaming cups of coffee and glasses filled with some kind of green liquid. On the tray was

also a cigar wrapped in gilded paper.

Putting the tray on the table, the Arab made a sign to Paul. He nodded his head. The Arab left, closing the door behind him.

- What did he tell you? the general asked.

"He's deaf and dumb," Paul explained, "he reminded you that it's time for you to get out." You've already sat through your fifty bucks.

- What news, - offended Klimov. - If they change the rules, then visitors should be warned about this. I can sit for another hour and a half.

"No way," Paul said. You can still drink coffee and that's it. And if you want to stay, go to another room, say, to Sashinsky. Maybe he hasn't finished solving his eternal triangles yet. The exit here is much more expensive than the entrance.

"All right," Klimov muttered displeasedly, "I'll drink coffee and go." You are all greedy. How is it possible to live here, in your vaunted West, I don't understand. But you still haven't told me about Fox. What happened next with him?

"Yes, I have never been particularly interested in this matter," Paul confessed. - If you are so interested in all this, then send someone to our archive. All cases related to Fox and his time have long been declassified, only the stamp "Not for publication" remains. Your guys do not know how to work with documents at all, everyone strives to steal some kind of fighter or tank from us, but it's not clear why ...

- Do not bay, - Klimov grimaced, - tell me what you know.

"As far as I remember," Paul replied, "Fox got to Stockholm on a Swedish steamer, and from there he moved to Berlin. By this time you have already had another revolution. Fox turned around in Berlin. They say that he managed to get an appointment with the Kaiser himself and interested him in his projects, presenting a letter signed almost by Wilson himself, the then president. I personally do not believe in this, although such letters in those days could be bought for five dollars anywhere. Old Wilhelm was also a romantic, greedy for various fantasies. In a word, Fox, as part of a German delegation with fake documents, arrived in Petrograd, then in Moscow ...

Did he know German? Klimov asked.

"You surprise me," Paul lit a cigar. - He is a German, of course, knew his native language.

- OK, sorry. These are details, of course," Klimov agreed. - And what happened next?

"Total fog," Paul admitted. "Looks like he got to the place where your last king was being held under arrest. Whether he shot him himself, or saved him, is unclear. But he worked a lot on the royal jewels. In the 1920s and 1930s five or six secret messages came from him to the State Department. They were all registers of found jewels, each about half a mile long.

Klimov's face changed:

Did he send reports to the State Department? Are you kidding?

Where else could he send them? Paul was surprised. - The CIA did not exist then, the FBI never dealt with such cases. All this audience was closed to the State Department.

Klimov did not analyze whether Paul really did not understand his question and decided to pretend to be a simpleton, and asked:

What did he do with these valuables?

- Like what? Paul was even more surprised. - I gave it to the Soviet government, keeping five percent for myself, as stipulated by the contract.

- What contract? Klimov jumped up. — Are you crazy? What five percent?

"Well, maybe seven," Paul shrugged, "I don't know. Maybe he lied to avoid paying taxes. Why are you so excited, Klimov? Is he your relative? Or did you just mark him as a contender for the throne?"

"Don't be sharp," Klimov said irritably, "are you telling the truth now or are you laughing at me?"

"I don't know if this is true or not," Paul laughed, "I didn't think about it. So it is written in his report after returning to the States. As they say, how much did you buy ...

Klimov felt a dull pain in the back of his head.

Did he return to the States? Klimov asked hoarsely.

"Yes," Paul nodded his head, "before Pearl Harbor. I think it was in the summer of 1941, but he died in 1969. His son is still alive. There was an article about him in one of our newspapers about five years ago. As far as I remember, it said that he was the most famous treasure hunter in the world, one of the few who made a huge fortune on this.

"Under the contract," Klimov whispered. He was under contract...

"I told you that you wouldn't understand anything," Paul spread his hands. "I wanted to give you an introductory lecture on the art of intelligence, but you interrupted me.

He looked at his watch.

- That's it, Klimov, roll. Meet me in Moscow at Nathan's.

- When? the general asked, thinking of something else.

"I'm not going to crawl on my stomach through the investigation strip," Paul laughed, "so you'll be one of the first to know about my return." Unless, of course, they send me somewhere in Rio or even further.

Why in Rio? Klimov did not understand.

- Yes, because I do not know the Portuguese language, - answered Paul, - our bureaucratic machine is no worse than yours. I must say that over the past fifty years you have greatly spoiled us.

- It still needs to be seen who wins, - Klimov took off his hat from a nail. "Do you remember well everything I told you?"

"I remember," Paul answered, "but I didn't understand everything.

- For example? the general was surprised.

— Where did you get the heir to the throne for your future monarchy? Paul

looked inquiringly at Klimov.

"I think that he got exactly into those five percent that your Fox blew from Comrade Stalin," Klimov answered, heading for the door.

- Wow! Paul called after him. - What a scammer. They succeeded because there was almost no bureaucracy over them.

"Tell your tales in Washington," Klimov answered him without turning around, going out onto the landing. Stopping at the reception desk, Klimov asked:

Are you also under contract?

"Oh, no, monsieur," the ex-sergeant replied. - I am a shareholder.

Klimov put a hundred dollars on the counter. He learned the rules of the club well.

II

On Monday morning, when Kumanin came to work, a little surprise awaited him.

"Sergey Stepanovich," Sveta, the ensign, announced as soon as she saw him, "Viktor Ivanovich called. Regarding you, he ordered the following: "To have the report on my desk on Monday."

- On Monday? Kumanin asked somewhat perplexedly. But today is Monday.

Sveta shrugged her shoulders: "Understand, they say, yourself. My job is to deliver."

Is the general in? Kumanin asked. - He is back?

"He is not in the department," the "ensign" answered dryly, making it clear that she did not intend to discuss such issues.

For himself, Kumanin decided that, of course, we were talking about next Monday. He can't write a report in a few hours, especially since he still didn't quite clearly understand what, except perhaps about dismissal.

The art of writing reports to superiors was born not today, but at least four thousand years ago. In our time it has reached, if not the highest, then a certain perfection. Without doing absolutely nothing, everything can be presented in the report in such a way that the authorities will have no choice but to present you for an order or promotion. You could, of course, fly to Sverdlovsk for a couple of days, chat with the guys from the local government, wander around the tracts where Yurovsky allegedly buried the royal bones, having previously dissolved them in acid, dine at public expense at the Ural restaurant, and then return to Moscow and put in front of you, on the one hand, the published part of Yurovsky's report, and on the other, the report of the investigator Sokolov. And then make a report according to all the rules. In conclusion, it could be pointed out that the task could not be completed to the end, since he, KGB Major Kumanin, was not allowed into any archive, despite the order of the leadership. And let them sort it out among themselves: who ordered what and who sabotaged the order.

But Kumanin was not going to fly to Sverdlovsk, but planned to go to Rostov the Great to find out how Alyosha Lisitsyn appeared there.

He was pleased with himself - operational instinct did not disappoint. Deviated, it seemed, to the side,

and investigating the mystery of the disappearance of Nadia Shestakova, he quite unexpectedly discovered the location of "Object 17", the very one on which the mysterious opera Lisitsyn had been working almost since 1918. It turned out that the "Object" is active and carefully guarded, moreover, it is located in a mansion, which, by a miraculous coincidence, once belonged to his namesake. Baba Dusya was found, whose husband once guarded this object, she herself saw (!) NKVD Major Lisitsyn.

"I wonder what General Klimov would say if Kumanin wrote about all this in a report? It is possible that he would immediately order him to be kicked out or imprisoned. For what? They will find something for it if they want to get away."

The rich own history has taught state security workers a lot, and above all - not to stick out. In the old days, when Mikhoels was killed in Minsk, they tried to attribute this murder for some reason to the "Benderites" - Ukrainian nationalists. To do this, a whole investigative team headed by the head of the investigative department of the Prosecutor General's Office, General Sheinina, arrived in the capital of Belarus. The most experienced investigator - Sheinin - quickly discovered that the traces of the killers lead straight to the Lubyanka, but he was naive, wrote about this in a report, and, of course, immediately sat down "for abuse of office."

Quite recently, when Brezhnev's brother-in-law, General of the Army Tsvigun, Andropov's deputy, committed suicide, some nimble detective immediately determined that Tsvigun had been killed, and almost the next day the detective was hit by a car.

If between Kumanin and General Klimov, as expected, there was a vertical chain of command: the group commander - the head of the department - the coordinator of the direction, and so on, then it would be possible to verbally report to the authorities, consult on how best to draw up a report, and listen to fatherly instructions, how when something from Lieutenant Colonel Volkov: "You know what, Seryozha, you just don't think of writing all this garbage in a report. Write briefly: preventive maintenance has been carried out, administrative measures have been taken, so far we consider it inappropriate to initiate a criminal case." But there was no one between him and General Klimov, and he had to make an independent decision. The required report should have been drawn up in such a way that, along with some fresh and original thoughts, it would contain the usual official "dirty stuff", and all taken together could only lead to dismissal from the authorities. Sergey too often caught himself thinking that he wanted to quit, and waited for his father to return, hoping to get his advice.

Thinking in this way, Kumanin went into his own office, opened the safe and pulled out a small Yugoslav typewriter - there were sorely lacking them at Lubyanka, and those that were available either did not work at all or worked very badly: "With one hand I print, another - I wipe my tears. Of course, none of the employees knew how to typewrite, and fragile modern typewriters, falling into their barbaric hands, instantly broke down. Getting a new car was as easy as getting a death sentence overturned. The authorities, on the other hand, crossed out any documents with their red pencils, and almost everything had to be retyped several times,

this led subordinates to a state close to insanity. Of course, there were secret and top-secret machine bureaus, but they were so busy with work that they could hardly manage to serve the leadership, which, by the way, had its own secretaries, like the "ensign" of the general Klimov.

There was a typewriter repair shop, but sending a typewriter there meant saying goodbye to it for at least six months.

There was a legend walking around the Lubyanka that once a Jew named Joseph, a typewriter repairman, came here. He was a great specialist in his field, but on checking he turned out to be either an American or an Israeli spy - it depended on who

told the story. Soon, Joseph, periodically stealing old tapes and rollers from repaired cars, was in the know about the Lubyanka, which he confessed to. Since no one could remember the name of this master, the story became a legend that was used as an explanation for why it was impossible to hire a repairman for writing machines.

Kumanin also managed to get the car from the confiscated. Previously, it belonged to some unrecognized poet who received a sentence for anti-Soviet agitation, and therefore work on it contributed to the birth of poetic inspiration. Kumanin kept it in a safe and never lent it to anyone under any guarantees. The morals in the Lubyanka were like in any army organization: you lend a typewriter to someone, then go and look for the truth. Let's say the captain needs to knock out a report, and while he is doing this, a big boss (or even an average one) comes to him: "Whose car is so cute?" - "From a neighboring unit." "They will find another for themselves, but put this one in my office."

Inserting a sheet of paper into the typewriter, Kumanin felt something like a surge of inspiration. Putting the familiar "Secret" stamp in the corner of the sheet (everything is secret, but what is considered unclassified is doubly secret), Sergey tapped the keys with two fingers.

REPORT OF MAJOR KUMANIN

"The heightened interest in the personality and fate of the last Russian Tsar, Nikolai Alexandrovich Romanov, known as Nicholas II, is explained to a large extent by the fact that the period of this man's presence on the throne was, as it were, a transitional period for changing the historical course of Russia from autocratic despotism to constitutional monarchy. This period, as you know, ended with the collapse of the Russian Empire, revived thanks to the Great October Socialist Revolution, with a complete change in the socio-political system and even the way of life.

Despite such an end to the reign of Nicholas II, it should be noted that in some respects, this period was unique in its results in the history of the country, which firmly embarked on the path of European development and economic integration with the rest of the world. The country witnessed the rapid growth of all types of industry, trade (both domestic and foreign), the flourishing of science, art and literature. At the same time, for the first time in the country, the financial system was brought into full order, a convertible currency was introduced, banking and the system of state lending were rapidly developing. At the same time, taxes were much lower than European ones, which, along with a sharp increase in domestic industrial production and the final gross product, attracted extensive foreign investment to the country. Both the Russian currency and Russian goods were very highly quoted on foreign exchanges.

According to many foreign experts, all this happened not in spite of, but thanks to the efforts of Nicholas II, who was trying to transfer Russia to the rails of bourgeois democracy, while numerous opposition parties, which had received the opportunity to act legally during the reign of Nicholas II, tried to return Russia to feudal serfdom. way, although they did not understand it. This extremely short period in the history of Russia, actually limited to 1907-1914, remained in the people's memory as a kind of bright tale of freedom and abundance.

The well-known excesses of the cult of personality, the temporary economic difficulties of the post-cult period, recognized and unambiguously condemned by our party, oddly enough, aroused nostalgia for this particular period, inevitably drawing attention to the personality of the last emperor, which has not received objective coverage in our historical science. and literature.

Some foreign sources consider the personality of the last [1] Russian tsar to be very worthy of careful study, because, according to them, never, neither before nor after, has the Russian state been headed by a person of such high moral principles, so intelligent, educated and knowledgeable in his field. As noted by the same sources, "not a single person in Russian history has been so grossly slandered both personally and in terms of state activity."

Kumanin took a sheet of paper out of the typewriter and inserted the next one.

"All of the above led to a well-known idealization of the personality of Nicholas II, which culminated in the initiation of the tsar himself and members of his family, who, according to the official version, died in Yekaterinburg in 1918, to the rank of Orthodox saints of the Russian Church Abroad. This circumstance prompted the well-known emigration monarchist and religious circles to try to get the so-called. "holy relics" of the new martyrs, that is, their remains, to further popularize the personality of the last monarch, turning him into a kind of standard of the Russian ruler.

However, the search for these remains, carried out by the USSR Ministry of Internal Affairs, the USSR Academy of Sciences and other organizations of union subordination, as well as by many enthusiasts, did not lead to practically any positive results.

By decision of the KGB of the USSR, the search for the remains of the last Russian tsar and members of his family was entrusted to me, Kumanin S.S. Based on a series of operational search activities and work with documents, I report to you the following ... "

"What am I reporting? thought Kumanin, interrupting his work and leaning back in his chair. "I have nothing to report. To report that with the help of Baba Dusi, he discovered the location of "Object 17", where opera Lisitsyn worked to search for royal jewels. But no one instructed me to look for "Object 17", which is probably well known to Klimov. And it is unlikely that the general will be delighted to know that I know this.

Several times lately, Sergei caught himself thinking that the task he received to search for the remains of the royal family shot in Yekaterinburg occupies him much less than the story of little Alyosha Lisitsyn, who turned out to be closely connected with the fate of the woman he once loved.

Starting to print his report to General Klimov, Kumanin decided not to work too hard, but to compile a small compilation of those unique materials with which his cabinets were stuffed. Klimov, of course, did not read these books, and it was possible to collect a murderous document capable of astonishing the leadership. And when the management comes to amazement, it puts all the reports under the cloth, and sends the performer on vacation.

Since it became clear that Klimov was unlikely to appear at the Office before next Monday, he still had enough time to put together a more or less logical report, go to Rostov the Great and try to find out something else about Nadia.

Glancing at his watch, Kumanin was convinced that it was too early to go to lunch, there was no need to rush anywhere, and decided to make a sacrifice to the God of Discipline and Order, having spent the whole day at work. Having made such a strong-willed decision and having used up all his inspiration on the first two pages, Kumanin thought that it would be a good idea to read some of the materials he kept in order to find a new source of inspiration for compiling the report.

Sergey remembered that about five or six years ago (he didn't remember exactly) an interesting rumor was circulating in their department. Somewhere (according to some versions, in Moscow, according to others - in Leningrad or Novosibirsk) either a major party leader was arrested - or a historian, working almost in the apparatus of the Central Committee. At the same time, several surnames were called, but all

turned out to be invented. This mythical figure was accused of all mortal sins: from spying for the United States and Israel to conducting active subversive activities, mainly with the help of malicious fabrications discrediting the Soviet system. According to the same rumors, some influential patrons saved this man from punishment. He was declared insane and sent to a "special psychiatric hospital", where he soon died from some kind of injection or pill. It was rumored that during the search they found a typewritten manuscript of a book called "The Infinite War", or "The Five Hundred Years' War", or maybe "Satan's Testing Ground". Colonel Kudryavtsev swore that he himself saw this book in the office of Klimov, then still a colonel. As is usually the case with all sorts of rumors, they talked about it and forgot about it. Management itself often spread all sorts of rumors about the Office in order to test the reaction of employees to certain inputs that were conceived at the top.

But one day Kudryavtsev, who by this time had already replaced Lieutenant Colonel Volkov as head of the department, handed over photocopies of typewritten sheets to Kumanin.

"You are our historian," he said to Kumanin, "read and have fun.

- And then? Sergei asked.

Keep it to yourself, it might come in handy. Remember, there were rumors about a mysterious book that roamed the general's offices? I think this is an excerpt from it.

- Did you read it yourself? Kumanin then asked.

"I looked it up," the head of the department waved his hand. - Anti-Soviet nonsense, about the last tsar. You may find something interesting for the general development.

Since there was no need to write any conclusion on this material, to subject it to an examination in order to identify the typewriter, and through it the author, Kumanin glanced through the material in a glimpse and fully agreed with Kudryavtsev's opinion. He put the folder with these sheets in a closet with other confiscated manuscripts. All hands did not reach them to activate and burn.

Now Kumanin remembered these sheets and decided to re-read them. His closets and safes were always perfectly organized, so he quickly found the folder and placed it on the table in front of him, pushing the typewriter aside. On the top sheet of the photocopy, the number "1" was written in black ink, and below, where the text began, it read:

"Chapter IX. Last attempt to make peace.

At the very end of the 19th century, - read Kumanin, - Russia received a unique chance to leave its centuries-old bloody path, and finally achieve peace, harmony and prosperity. The country received this chance in the person of the new emperor - the last Russian Tsar Nikolai Alexandrovich Romanov, who ascended the throne after the unexpected death of his father in 1894.

"The newly-appeared emperor is a completely unique phenomenon in Russian history. It is impossible to find another such ruler among the princes of Kyiv, the kings of Moscow, the emperors of all Russia. On the Russian throne was the same Russian intellectual whose image was timidly modeled by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Chekhov and Kuprin, Klyuchevsky and Solovyov, Rozanov and Florensky. The appearance of such a person on the Russian throne was a complete surprise for his contemporaries, but they did not have time to appreciate him. Compatriots could not understand this man, neither those who perished in thousands in the Bolshevik camps, nor those who vegetated in emigration. "Oh, it does!" thought Kumanin, more with a feeling of admiration than indignation.

"None of the Russians, and, perhaps, not only Russian statesmen, was so slandered as Nicholas II. They began to throw mud at him even during his lifetime, at first timidly: would they tear out his tongue, would they put him in jail under Article 246 for twelve years, then, since nothing like this had happened, everything was bolder, more cheeky, beyond the bounds of decency. But it was not just anyone who was subjected to attacks and slander in his own country, but an autocrat, an absolute monarch who had the right to execute and pardon his subjects at his own will!

During the years of the communist regime, that is, over the past seventy years, they tried to erase the name of Nicholas II from the pages of Russian history, they tried to make him a nonentity and a bloodsucker at the same time. Not a single Russian tsar aroused as much hatred among the new rulers as Nicholas II, which in itself was quite amazing. Analyzing the nature of this hatred, it is easy to understand that it is based on the desire to hide at all costs what was done by this remarkable man, the monarch, who wanted and could lead Russia out of the terrible state in which it had been for a millennium.

But historical truth is as hard to hide as an awl in a sack. During the twenty-three years of his reign, Nicholas II never raised his voice at anyone, he did not yell obscene language at the ministers and did not throw bent forks into the plates of foreign ambassadors, like his father, did not beat the chamberlains with a cane, like his grandfather, did not whip cabbies in the face and policemen, like great-grandfather. With everyone he was restrained, amiable and impeccably polite. He never (until the last minutes of his life) lost his self-control and courage, did not throw tantrums, did not threaten anyone with a fortress or Siberia. He was above the gossip, dirt, slander that fell upon him. He never applied the law "On lèse majesté", he did not deprive a single person of freedom in a non-judicial manner, that is, by his own will, to which he had the right. He became the first tsar in the history of Russia, who realized himself as the head of state, and not the owner of a huge ridiculous farmstead. He sincerely loved his country and his people, who, unfortunately, were not prepared for the appearance of such a sovereign ...

He did not get drunk, like his father, was not a womanizer and sybarite, like his grandfather, a male and martinet, like his great-grandfather. He dearly loved his family, in whose circle he spent all his free time. Together they staged family plays, read aloud Garshin, Chekhov and Flaubert, laughed at Averchenko's feuilletons, took a great interest in photography, played cricket and tennis.

Nikolai loved opera and ballet, often attended premieres, and patronized actors. He maintained theaters, museums, academies, lyceums, gymnasiums, orphanages and much more at his own expense. All these "Imperial" institutions were maintained at his expense. He played the piano, the guitar, sang and drew well.

He was a shy and very modest man. His father did not have time to promote him to the generals, and Nikolai remained a colonel for the rest of his life - he considered it immodest to raise himself in rank. The case is just incredible. Comrade Stalin, who, unlike Nicholas II, did not have any education at all, did not hesitate to put down twenty-six million soldiers and make himself a generalissimo. Nicholas II was unnecessarily merciful, he pardoned even when it was necessary to execute.

He sincerely believed in God and was a bit of a fatalist ("All the will of God"), he had no doubts about the truth of Orthodoxy, but he was religiously tolerant and brought up in others religious tolerance, unprecedented for such a military-clerical country as Russia. It was during his reign that the cathedral mosque and the choral synagogue were erected in the capital of the empire, at the opening of which he personally attended. Under him, a huge Catholic cathedral began to be built in St. Petersburg, larger than the Parisian Notre Dame. And this is in a country that has been fighting the Tatars and Turks for centuries, in a society that professes hatred for Jews and is afraid of the Vatican. Quietly, with dignity, this man experienced a terrible family drama: his only son Alexei - the hope of his father and dynasty -

was terminally ill. Attacks of hemophilia could send the boy to the grave at any moment. Imagine a father whose dearly beloved son could die at any moment!

"Yes," even his fans object, "he was a good person, decent and kind. He should be a regiment commander, a gymnasium director, a professor at the academy. But he did not at all correspond to his position as Emperor of the All-Russian. Their delusions are understandable, since there was no such tsar in the history of Russia. It was the Sovereign. The tsar, who was perfectly aware of his role in the country, well aware of the problems, the emperor, who with a sharp turn of the helm led Russia with hackneyed, blood-stained and dirt tracks onto the wide road of European civilization.

The bitter nostalgia for old Russia, which gripped most of the population of the USSR, is not nostalgia for the times of Ivan the Terrible, Peter the Great or Nicholas I, it is not even nostalgia for the reign of the last two Alexanders, it is almost a longing for the short period of the reign of Nicholas II, from the moment Russo-Japanese War to the start of World War I. For the first time, the young monarch began to act independently, not looking back with fear at a whole platoon of his uncles - the brothers of the deceased parent ...

Historians, especially Soviet ones, take great pleasure in making Nicholas II responsible for Khodynka, Tsushima, on January 9, which is quite fair, since the HEAD OF STATE is responsible for everything, regardless of personal participation or non-participation in the events. Then why is it believed that all the positive changes in the country during the period of his reign took place not by his will, not thanks to his hard state work, but in spite of? Nicholas II was more efficient than Peter I, but, unlike the latter, he did not spend time in orgies and shameful amusements, he did not go around the dungeons, teaching executioners. He carefully delved into all spheres of state life and international relations, imagining the future of Russia in a completely different way than all his predecessors. And he managed to do a lot.

Under Nicholas II, the Russian financial and monetary system was created. More recently, according to the apt expression of M.E. Saltykov-Shchedrin, for the Russian ruble abroad you could only get in the face, during the reign of the last emperor this ruble crowded the franc and the mark, overtook the dollar and was rapidly approaching the pound sterling in quotation. For the first time in the history of Russia, revenues exceeded expenses: if in 1908 this excess amounted to 30 million gold rubles, then in 1912 it was already 335 million. This happened without increasing the tax burden. A law of 1896 introduced a gold currency in Russia, and the state bank was granted the right to issue 300 million rubles in bank notes not backed by gold reserves. But the government not only did not take advantage of this right, but, on the contrary, ensured paper circulation of gold cash by more than one hundred percent.

The burden of direct taxes under Nicholas II in Russia was four times less than in France and Germany, and eight and a half times less than in England. All this led to an unprecedented flourishing of Russian industry and an influx of capital from all developed countries. Between 1894 and 1913, young Russian industry quadrupled its productivity. In the four years preceding the First World War, the number of newly founded joint-stock companies increased by one hundred and thirty-two per cent, and the capital invested in them quadrupled.

The length of the railways increased by 1574 kilometers per year (the highest indicator of the communist regime by 1956 was 995 kilometers.)

On the eve of the national catastrophe, Russia's agriculture reached an unprecedented level. During the twenty years of the reign of Nicholas II, that is, during the period of peacetime, the collection

the grain harvest doubled. From 1907 to 1913, the yields of the main cereal crops in Russia were one-third higher than in the United States, Canada, and Argentina combined. Never in the future under the Bolsheviks did this happen again! Under Nicholas II, the country became the main supplier of food to Western Europe, seventy percent of the world's oil exports and fifty percent of the world's eggs were exported to Russia. Bearded Russian merchants were replaced by industrialists and financiers who had Russian and foreign universities behind them. The world's largest river fleet smoked along the country's rivers. The silver age in art, the golden age in literature and printing, the flourishing of journalism, newspaper business, the emergence of thousands of various magazines, hundreds of new museums and fifty churches in St. Petersburg alone - all this took place during the reign of Nikolai Alexandrovich Romanov. He is introducing the foundations of parliamentary democracy and free elections in the country, closely following these processes, knowing full well that the country is not quite ready for such transformations yet. Under Nicholas II, an unprecedented program of public education was introduced. Universities and institutions of higher learning are flourishing with a freedom they never had and never will have in the future. There are still legends about Nikolaev gymnasiums, real and commercial schools, and the level of education received in them is unattainable for today's Soviet universities. By 1913, the total budget of public education reaches a colossal amount - half a billion gold rubles, and its growth rate over twenty years is 628 percent! At the very beginning of the emperor's reign, primary education in Russia became free, and from 1908 it became compulsory. Russian science is undergoing unprecedented development. The names of Pavlov, Mendeleev, Popov, Bekhterev and many other world famous scientists sounded at this time. Apart from Lomonosov, what did we have before that?

The reign of Nicholas II is a true RUSSIAN MIRACLE. The Millennium War is over. Open space for creative and creative activity, he captured the entire Russian society. The Russian intellect received a powerful energy charge, perhaps for the first time in a thousand years, it was able to manifest itself in full. Thought worked for creation, not for destruction. The most interesting plans for new economic reforms and financial policies were drawn up, which would inevitably lead to Russia's hegemony in the world market, not military hegemony, but economic hegemony.

Of course, it would be foolish to deny that during the reign of Nicholas II in Russia there were no problems that were inevitable with such a rapid movement from feudal darkness to civilization, with a breakthrough from world outsiders to world leaders. But what the last Russian tsar managed to do with the half-barracks-half-prison he inherited is admirable. A miracle happened, and there is no other explanation for this. Perhaps Satan, who chose Russia as his testing ground, closed his eyelids for just a minute.

Then something happened that inevitably had to happen in Russia with such a tsar as Nicholas II was - he was overthrown from the throne and mercilessly destroyed along with his family. The Russian Empire collapsed and ceased to exist. Power on its ruins was seized by a terrorist organization led by Vladimir Lenin. The country was drowned in bloody turmoil. The number of victims began to number in the millions ... "

Then the text was cut off.

Kumanin drew attention to the fact that what he read did not arouse in him either indignation or contemptuous disdain, as several years ago, when he first looked through the material.

He hid the sheets of the unfinished report together with the typewriter in a safe, then went to one of the cabinets and randomly took out one of the photo albums published in the West, dedicated to the life and reign of the last emperor.

Right on the cover of the album was placed a photograph of Nikolai P. In the coat of a captain of the 1st rank, he stood smiling, putting his hands on the shoulders of his son, dressed in a sailor suit. Looking into the open face and kind eyes of the man whose mysteriously disappeared remains he was ordered to find, Kumanin for the first time felt an incomprehensible excitement, as if he and Nikolai in the photograph were connected by some incomprehensible, invisible threads. He quickly put the album back on the shelf and locked the fireproof cabinet.

III

Veliky Kumanin arrived in Rostov by bus from Moscow to Yaroslavl, which departed at half past six in the morning from the Riga Station Square. In fact, the rules required Kumanin to warn the local department of the KGB about his appearance in the city. Gone are the days when the Chekists of provincial Russian cities, languishing from idleness, sucked five or six cases a year out of their fingers on the facts of anti-Soviet propaganda and signs of treason. Now Rostov the Great, having restored its famous Kremlin, was included in the number of cities of the so-called "Golden Ring" and the KGB city department worked almost around the clock, looking for spies among numerous foreign tourists. There was a lot of work: I had to monitor unauthorized contacts between local residents and foreigners and wage an endless war with black marketers in the secret hope that one of them would turn up as a spy. But since the case that brought Sergei here had nothing to do with the exploits of the local KGB, he decided to ignore this rule and immediately went to the police.

"I'm listening to you," an elderly major said glumly, the deputy head of the Rostov city department of the Internal Affairs Directorate (the head was summoned to a meeting in Yaroslavl), returning Kumanin's certificate, which did not arouse any emotions in him at all. - What questions do you have for us?

The major looked tired, and his whole appearance suggested that the last thing in the world he wanted to deal with was the affairs of the Moscow KGB.

"About a year ago," Kumanin began, "at the Moscow-Yaroslavl bus stop, your employees discovered a five-year-old lost boy named Alyosha Lisitsyn ...

- It was like that, - the major confirmed, - I remember. We sent him to Moscow ... that is, we sent him. Something happened?

"It happened," Kumanin confirmed, "a lot happened. That is why I wanted to talk with the comrades from the patrol service who were involved in this case, to read, if possible, the protocols or some other documents on this case.

The major sighed and, picking up the battered telephone, said:

- Grishin, come to my place for a couple of minutes.

A young senior lieutenant in a blue uniform shirt with an open collar entered the office. He looked inquiringly at the major, not bothering himself with any statutory phrases about his arrival at the call of his superiors.

"A comrade from Moscow came," the major explained, pointing in the direction of Kumanin, "from the committee. He is interested in the circumstances of the discovery last year of a little boy. Alyosha Lisitsyn was his name, remember?

"That's right, I remember," replied Senior Lieutenant Grishin, "discovered by Junior Sergeant Vlasov at the bus stop at the signal of citizens.

Was he alone at the bus stop when you found him? Kumanin asked.

"One," Grishin confirmed, "I believe the child got off the regular bus. We have it for three minutes. The mother started talking or fell asleep, and he got off the bus. And the bus left. Funny kid, what only by heart did not know. We remember him well on duty.

— Have you been there? Kumanin asked.

"That's right, it was," Grishin nodded his head. - I designed it, And then I did a lot of it. He made up all the papers for him when they took him to the orphanage.

"Have you tried to find one of his relatives," Kumanin asked, "did you advertise?"

"Well, how about it," the major himself answered instead of Grishin. - At the stop they put up an announcement: "Someone then lost a boy of about five years old, who called himself Alyosha Lisitsyn, contact the city police department," the announcement was given both in their own newspaper and in Yaroslavl. The transport police were asked. Nobody responded.

"Interesting," Kumanin said. - Have you worked out the version that he could arrive in the city with someone who came on a tour along the Golden Ring route?

"They didn't work it out on purpose," Senior Lieutenant Grishin replied, "but they put up an ad in the Kremlin, They would turn to us if someone lost a child. They lose the keys - they turn to us. And here is a child. Is it a joke!

"I would like to look at the city's incident log for that day," Kumanin asked. - You recorded this incident there, I hope?

"Of course," Grishin confirmed, glancing at the major.

He nodded wearily.

The senior lieutenant left and soon returned with a stationery book, which turned out to be an incident log for July last 1988.

"So," he said, flipping through the pages, "here. July 28, 13.40. A boy of about five years old was found at the bus stop, unaccompanied by adults. Delivered to the city department, called himself Alexei Lisitsyn. He cannot say anything definite about his appearance in the city, he said that he does not remember with whom, when and why he came to Rostov ... "

"Let me read it myself," Kumanin asked.

Grishin put the magazine in front of him.

The incidents of July 28, probably, as always, began from zero hours. "The husband made a drunken brawl, beat his wife. Two drunken citizens smashed the window of a shoe store. Attempted theft of a private car. Arrested not working anywhere. Previously convicted tried to resist the district police officer. Teenagers set fire to the Soyuzpechat stall. Detained..."

July 28 fell on a Thursday last year. The day was routine.

Kumanin continued to skim the page with his eyes. "12:20. Citizen p / v lost consciousness on the territory of the Kremlin. Provided medical assistance."

In one of his versions, Kumanin suggested that Alyosha Lisitsyn came to Rostov on an excursion with one of his relatives (with his mother or grandmother, finally grandfather). He could get lost for a variety of reasons, for example, when the one with whom he arrived became ill. Few

what could have happened! The famous brick could fall, a car could knock down. As a result, Alyosha turned out to be unclaimed by anyone.

— What does it mean, — asked Kumanin, pointing with his finger at a line in the incident log, — “civilian p/v”.

“It means: “old age,” the major explained.

- And what kind of elderly citizen is she, who became ill on the territory of the Kremlin? Who is she? - Kumanin continued to keep his finger on this line.

“I don’t remember,” the major admitted honestly and asked Grishin:

Do you remember what happened then?

“I don’t remember, to be honest,” Grishin answered, “we have a permanent picket there on a round-the-clock basis. With two officers in shifts. If it’s so important,” he turned to Kumanin, “we can go there now and find out the details, if, of course, they remember. A year has already passed.

"Let's go," Sergei agreed.

Kumanin, accompanied by Grishin, went out into the street, where three police UAZs were standing. Grishin went to one of them.

“Maybe we can take a walk,” suggested Kumanin, “it’s not far from here. What’s in a car to steam in such heat?

Grishin shrugged. “You can also go on foot, if the operative from Moscow wants it.” Muscovites usually did not like to go on foot, more often coming here on black “Volga”.

Rostov the Great is mentioned in chronicles as far back as 862. At one time, it was famous for its temples and crafts, mainly icon painting and the production of the famous Russian enamel. In the 16th century, Sisoy the Great founded the Rostov Kremlin, a marvel of architecture that reflected the military fearlessness and piety of the people.

During the years of Soviet power, everything here fell into disrepair, and the former grand-ducal capital turned into a dull regional center, known only for the fact that its flax-spinning and clothing factories constantly fulfilled the plan one hundred and one percent. The Kremlin also fell into disrepair. Only quite recently did they decide to put in order the most ancient cities of Russia, such as Pereslavl-Zalessky, Zagorsk and Rostov the Great. Probably, to attract foreign tourists, the Kremlin was somehow restored, calling it a cultural and historical museum-reserve.

There were two tourist buses parked at the ancient walls. The police picket was located directly under the arch of the entrance to the territory of the Kremlin. In a small picket room, fanning himself with a newspaper, sat a duty sergeant. He was clearly tipsy, as evidenced by the fairly steady couples that filled law enforcement territory.

- Where are the others? Grishin asked.

“We went to Mikhalych,” the sergeant admitted, “he brought a whole car of potatoes from Yaroslavl. He promised half a bag if they helped to unload ...

“All right,” Grishin interrupted his subordinate’s revelations, “here’s a comrade from Moscow arrived. He is interested in a citizen who has become ill from the heat.

- When is that? said the sergeant. "Someone gets sick every day. They come already drunk in the trash, and then they fall.

"Last year," Grishin explained, "July 28 last year.

- You give! the sergeant was outraged. How can I remember what happened last year? I already forgot what happened yesterday.

"That's what you mean," Grishin said sternly, "don't argue with me. Do not remember the magazine come on incidents. Let's see for ourselves. And the senior lieutenant savagely pointed his eyes at Kumanin.

The magazine was found rather quickly in a closet filled with empty bottles.

"They collect it on the territory," Grishin considered it his duty to explain to Kumanin, "but there is nowhere to hand it over. Once a year, before the Lenin subbotnik, we drive the car to Yaroslavl.

"Well done," Kumanin praised. Let's take a look at the magazine.

In the incident log on the territory of the "Historical Monument", in fact, the same thing was recorded as in the city department, only with a note: "An ambulance was called. First aid was rendered to comrade Lazarenko N.I." and signature: "junior sergeant Seleznev."

"I don't understand something," Kumanin asked, "N. I. Lazarenko is the name of the victim?" How to read: First aid was provided to Comrade Lazarenko N.I.?

- Nope, - the sergeant laughed, - here it should be read like this: first aid was provided by Comrade N. I. Lazarenko. This is Ninka Lazarenko - Deputy Director for General Affairs. Fighting girl, I'll tell you.

Accompanied by a sergeant (Grishin, referring to business, returned to the city department), Kumanin went to the territory of the Kremlin, climbed the porch, made in the old Russian style, with pot-bellied columns, a tower roof and an intricate cockerel on a knitting needle. However, behind all this exoticism, a completely modern government corridor and doors with numbers were found, as in any institution.

Nina Lazarenko - a pretty girl of about twenty-five - was sitting at the table and filling out some forms. Seeing the incoming sergeant, she, not noticing Kumanin, asked:

- Vasya, what do you want? I'm busy.

"Comrade, here," the sergeant pointed at Kumanin, "from Moscow. Wants to talk.

"Are you from Moscow, comrade," Nina asked, "from the Central Committee of the Komsomol?"

"You can be free, sergeant," Kumanin said to the policeman, who seemed not to be leaving. When he, blushing forcefully, left the room, Kumanin introduced himself:

- No, I'm not from the Central Committee of the Komsomol. I am from the KGB.

He had a good look at Nina and understood how to behave with her. A Komsomol badge glowed on the girl's white blouse, on the table lay a notebook of a delegate of some Komsomol conference, and from her whole stately figure, from her energetic face and even from her hair, there was such an ideological conviction that there was no doubt that at the university Nina was a Komsomol organizer of the faculty, least. After Kumanin told Nina who he was, the expression in her eyes showed a readiness to fulfill any

exercise.

"We are investigating," Kumanin continued, showing his ID, which the girl looked at like a deeply religious person looks at a miraculous icon, "a matter of great state importance. We hope that you, Comrade Lazarenko, will be able to help us.

"Of course, comrade..." Nina looked at Kumanin with wide eyes, as if spellbound.

"Major," Kumanin prompted, "but you, Nina, can call me Sergei Stepanovich.

How can I help you, Comrade Major? the girl asked in a voice broken by trust.

"About a year ago," Kumanin said, "you gave first aid to an old woman who became ill here, on the territory of the Rostov Kremlin. Could you remember the details of this case.

In the eyes of the girl, at first, anxiety flashed, but quickly, however, suppressed by the consciousness of her own rightness.

"I remember that incident very well," she said, "and I remember this grandmother. She annoyed me so much, Comrade Major, that for two days I walked around like crazy.

Seeing that Nina Lazarenko was clearly pleased to address him with the words "comrade major," Kumanin did not remind her of her permission to switch to her first name and patronymic, and asked:

- What kind of grandmother, tell me. And in general, what happened here?

"Grandma is all so clean, old-fashioned, very pleasant," Nina said, "some kind of, how should I say, old-fashioned. Now these are rarely seen. She even wore a flowered hat. And she spoke as the heroes of Chekhov and Kuprin speak in books. So, it seems to me that no one talks with us anymore. Or maybe I thought. Not I know.

Was she alone? Kumanin held his breath, waiting for an answer.

"With my grandson," Nina answered, "a boy of about five years old. She tried to persuade him: "Alyoshenka, go play, little one. Let me talk." And he ran across the lawn.

Kumanin's mouth even went dry from excitement.

"Give me a drink, please," he said hoarsely to Nina.

She poured him a glass of water from a carafe. The water was warm and nasty.

- What's wrong with you? - the girl noticed Kumanin's excitement

"It's all right," Kumanin grimaced, swallowing warm water, "continue, Nina, please. Everything you say is extremely important, believe me. Kumanin paused, putting his thoughts in order, and asked:

- She came with a tour, this grandmother? How did she even get here?

- With a tour, - Nina confirmed, - by bus from Moscow along the Golden Ring. If you like, comrade major, I can tell you exactly the number of the bus and the name of the driver. We have

Copies of waybills are kept. The names of the guides are listed there.

"Yes, if it is possible," Kumanin nodded his head, "and what happened next that day?"

"This old woman came up to me," Nina continued. - I, comrade major, am the deputy director of the museum-reserve. And everything hangs on me, from funds to, excuse me, sewerage. As I graduated from the University in Yaroslavl in 1983, this is how I work here. You can't find a director with fire - he lives in Moscow, they come to me for all questions. So, this grandmother also came up to me and began to tell the story that in 1913, can you imagine, she presented some kind of icon to the cathedral in the Kremlin. He says miraculous, Mother of God of Rostov. And I would really like to venerate her and pray. I thought back then, how old is she? She looks like seventy-five, and she says to me:

- Baby, I'm already over ninety. "Wow," I thought, "how well preserved!" And she, therefore, says everything about this icon: "They say, she should have a gold salary with precious stones." I'm trying to explain to her that all the precious metals from the icons have long been removed and transferred to the state, and that we can't have such an icon. Such things are in special storage in special institutions. And she keeps telling me that maybe the salary was removed, but the icon should be here. And she begged me so much that..." The girl stopped and blushed.

"Go on," Kumanin asked, looking at her in surprise.

"I confess," Nina said in obvious embarrassment, "I confess, Comrade Major, that I broke the rules. But she asked me so much and she was so neat, intelligent, that I ...

Nina fell silent again, and then, as if gathering her courage, laid out everything "essentially a misconduct committed by her."

"I let her into the funds," the girl said, blushing to tears, for she was already sure that the Chekist from Moscow had arrived specifically to investigate precisely this malicious service crime - the admission of unauthorized persons to the funds of state museums, and now she will definitely be kicked out with her beloved work. But Nina Lazarenko was courageous man.

"I know that it is forbidden," she admitted candidly, "and I am ready to bear responsibility for my misdeed. But this old woman was so extraordinary that I simply could not answer her: "Citizen, take the attitude of the Ministry of Culture, then we'll talk." I know that's exactly what I should have done. Should I write an explanation?

What are you talking about, Nina? Kumanin even shook his head in amazement. - What is the explanation? I'm interested in this old woman, not you. So, you admitted it to the funds, where, if I understand you correctly, old icons are kept, representing cultural and historical value? Apparently, in order for her to find the icon she was talking about?

"Yes," Nina nodded her head, calming down a little, "that's how it was, as you say, comrade major." We went to the vault. We have icons hanging there, some are placed along the walls, some just lie in heaps. We have been given a lot in recent years from the surrounding villages. Churches there are so plundered that they decided that we would be more reliable. So, I'm going, the light is on, and she minces after me. I walked forward a little, then looked back and saw: my grandmother is on her knees, holding in her hands one icon that stood against the wall, kissing her, whispering something and crying. I was even confused, I wanted to call out to her, they say so myself

it is impossible to lead, and she suddenly, with this icon in her hands, fell on her side and fell to the floor. He lies, his eyes are closed, and he holds the icon on his chest. At first I thought it was some kind of sectarian. Then I realized that my grandmother was dying. My grandmother recently died in much the same way. I watched TV and fell off the chair to the floor ... - Nina's voice broke off from unrest.

"I was confused," she continued, "the phone is not in the vault. You can't run anywhere and leave the room open. We have a first-aid post, but the nurse appears there only on special occasions, when foreign tourists come. I raised my head to her, calling. I see that her lips quiver and her eyelids move, she is still alive. I put a few icons under her head. Here, thank you, someone passed along the corridor. I shouted for a policeman to be called here from the picket and for an ambulance to be called from the city.

- Has the ambulance arrived? Kumanin asked.

"Yes," Nina breathed heavily. Painful memories, apparently, greatly agitated her. - An ambulance arrived, and she was taken to the 1st city hospital. She died there soon after. I heard.

- Died? - Kumanin asked again, - And what was her name, do you remember?

"I don't know," Nina smiled bewilderedly, "She didn't say, I didn't ask. You go to the hospital. They should know. Especially since she died.

"Yes," Kumanin said. - All this is very interesting. And what happened to the boy.

"I completely forgot about him in that turmoil," Nina confessed. "Then I only found out that the police had picked him up somewhere on the square near the bus stop. They even called me recognize...

The girl fell silent again.

- And what, - asked Kumanin, - identified?

"No," Nina Lazarenko said firmly, "I didn't recognize him. The police picked something completely different. This red-haired one, and the one that ran across our lawns, was dark-haired, like a gypsy. Where he went, I don't know.

"Good," Kumanin sighed. - Last question. What kind of icon was that the old woman was looking for? Didn't you find out?

"Nothing special," Nina shrugged. — An icon as an icon. Local Rostov letter of the beginning of this century. Then they were stamped here at the rate of ten a day. In Rostov there was a whole artel of icon painters, their own school. The Rostov icon can be immediately identified by the letter. I can show you if you want.

"Thank you," Kumanin said. "I'm not very good at these things. And the icon that this grandmother was talking about, the Mother of God of Rostov in a precious salary, did you find out anything about it?

"Yes," Nina replied, "there were two of them. One large one - it is kept in the Tretyakov Gallery, however, already in a dummy salary, the second small one - was indeed once kept here. But it was confiscated from us long ago and transferred to the Zagorsk Lavra.

— Is there any information about how or under what circumstances this icon appeared to you? Kumanin asked.

"There are no documents on this," the girl said, "but there is a legend that this icon was presented to the Rostov church by the imperial family in 1913, when the tsar and his relatives toured Russian cities. It was during the tercentenary of the Romanov dynasty.

— Is that how? Kumanin was surprised. Has the king been to this city?

"Of course," Nina confirmed. "Didn't you know? She went to the closet, rummaged around a little, took out a rather tattered pamphlet, and handed it to Kumanin.

The brochure was published in Rostov in 1913 by the dependent, as it was said, of the merchant Ivakin. It was called "Making the county town of Rostov Veliky happy with the stay of His Imperial Majesty the Sovereign Emperor Nicholas II and all of His August Family in the summer of the Nativity of Christ 1913".

Kumanin leafed through the little book and quickly came across a photograph, under which was the caption: "Their Imperial Highnesses Grand Duchesses Olga and Tatyana deign to present the rector of the monastery, His Grace Nikodim, with the miraculous icon of the Rostov Mother of God." Below it was typed in small print: "photo of Cornelius." "Well done Cornelius! Kumanin thought. "You'll beat my brains out on the wall with these things." There was a pounding in the temple.

He looked at Nina. The expression of enthusiastic patriotism that shone on the girl's face at the beginning of their conversation disappeared, giving way to sadness and fatigue.

IV

Anatoly Abramovich Winkel, chief physician of the 1st city hospital of Rostov, turned pale at the sight of the Kumanin certificate and sank heavily into a chair.

- Again? Did you get a letter from your brother?

Have you already brought it? Kumanin asked curiously. - Brother in Israel, or what? It is a great responsibility to have relatives in a Zionist state so hostile to our country.

It turned out that about six months ago, two employees from Lubyanka brought Anatoly Abramovich a letter from his brother from Israel and forced him to write a reply.

"All right," Kumanin reassured. - I'm on a completely different issue. About a year ago, an elderly woman was brought to your hospital in a serious condition, apparently with a heart attack. I would like to take a look at the medical history and other documents related to her death. She died, as far as I know?

The head physician turned even paler, apparently the shadow of the unforgettable "doctors' case" of the fifties was imagined. Fussily dialing the number of the internal telephone, Anatoly Abramovich, with a very noticeable note of hysteria in his voice, addressed:

— Cardiology? Tatyana Nikolaevna to me. Urgently. What does "bypass" mean? Let him interrupt the tour, since I said!

A few minutes later, a tall woman in a white coat with a traditional phonendoscope on her chest appeared in the office.

— What happened, Anatoly Abramovich? she asked in an unhappy voice. "Are you always interrupting me?"

"Tatyana Nikolaevna," the head physician said nervously. - A comrade here came from the authorities, from Moscow ...

Dr. Winkel began to wipe his spectacles, while Tatyana Nikolaevna stared unfriendly at the silent Kumanin.

- This is about that patient, - having coped with the glasses, the head physician continued, - who about a year ago was brought to us by ambulance from the Kremlin. She, it seems, came with a tour, and then she died with us. Do you remember this case, Tatyana Nikolaevna? The comrade is interested, as far as I understood, why there was a lethal outcome?

"I remember this case," Tatyana Nikolaevna confirmed, "the patient was brought in with a massive heart attack. We placed her in intensive care, but could not do anything. Too extensive a heart attack with a lesion ... By the way, do you know how old she was? Tatyana Nikolaevna challenged Kumanin.

- How many? Kumanin looked at her questioningly. "Nearly ninety-two," said the head of the cardiology department.

"Are you asking why she died?" From old age.

The woman's voice was harsh. She had no relatives in Israel. But she knew very well how the representatives of the authorities like to make doctors extreme at any opportunity.

"Calm yourself, comrades," Kumanin suggested peacefully. - Anatoly Abramovich probably did not understand me quite correctly. I am not so much interested in the fact of the death of this old woman as in her personality. Like her last name etc. You know, we have a lot of people on the wanted list, including those who are considered missing.

"Understood," said Anatoly Abramovich and asked Tatyana Nikolaevna. - What is the name of the patient?

"I don't remember," the manager shrugged her shoulders, "I didn't even know her last name. The medical history was filled in by the sister, and the death certificate, probably, by Bogomolov.

- Bring the case history, - ordered Anatoly Abramovich, - and call Bogomolov to me.

"I handed it over to the archive a long time ago," Tatyana Nikolaevna replied, still irritably. "Perhaps it has already been activated.

What do you mean activated? Anatoly Abramovich exploded. - Five years it is necessary to keep a history of the disease in case of death. Five years, and not even a year...

This is no longer a question for me, "Tatyana Nikolaevna frankly blurted out angrily. — Excuse me, comrades, but the sick are waiting for me. And the woman made an attempt to leave the office.

"Excuse me," Kumanin intervened, "but you'll have to be late." Find the case history and bring it here. Perhaps I have some questions for you. And once again, please calm down. No one has anything against you personally.

Despite this, Tatyana Nikolaevna, blazing with indignation, withdrew, slamming the door of the head physician's office very solidly behind her.

Apologizing to Kumanin, Anatoly Abramovich himself jumped out somewhere. Tatyana Nikolaevna was the first to return, carrying a medical history found in the archive. She silently laid it on the table in front of Kumanin. Sergei took a medical history and felt the blood hit his head, and a nasty weakness appeared in his legs. In the column "F.I.O. sick" was a note made, as usual, in a quick and hard to read medical handwriting: "Romanova T.N., 1897". It was further written: "Delivered to

unconscious on July 28, 1988 by ambulance. Diagnosis: myocardial infarction.

Kumanin took himself in hand.

"On the basis of what the initial data for this patient were filled in," he asked, trying to speak calmly.

"I don't know," the head of cardiology replied. - I believe, from the words of the patient.

"So she regained consciousness?" Kumanin tried to clarify.

"Comrade," answered Tatyana Nikolaevna, "I have two hundred patients in the department, I have neither the time nor the opportunity to memorize such things. Besides, it happened a year ago. The record could be made by the attending physician or nurse. But both of them have already retired.

Kumanin was about to write down the names of the retired doctor and nurse in order to interview them later, but at that moment Dr. Winkel returned to the office, accompanied by a tall man with a broad, good-natured and smiling face. The man turned out to be Nikolai Ivanovich Bogomolov, who worked in the hospital part-time as a pathologist and head of the morgue. All the heads of the morgues whom Kumanin had to see were, as a rule, good-natured and cheerful big men. Nikolai Ivanovich opened the folder to Kumanin.

"Let me make sure," he said softly, "a copy of the death certificate: "Romanova Tatyana Nikolaevna, born in 1897, 91 full years old, cause of death is a heart attack." An autopsy was not performed, since there is a provision that one is carried out at the request of relatives or authorities, or by decision of medical workers in any difficult cases. In this case, the cause of death was very clear. Consider the age of the patient...

- On the basis of what are the patient's initial data recorded? Kumanin asked again.

"It's indicated here," Nikolai Ivanovich replied in the same soft voice. - On the basis of the deceased's passport. Everything is recorded here: passport number, series, permanently registered at the address: Romanovo village, Asinovsky district, Tomsk region, 5th Lespromkhoznyaya, 7. Let me make sure.

"I'll take this document," Kumanin said.

"For God's sake," agreed the head of the morgue, "take it." Just write a receipt for the seizure of the document. And put the number of your document.

Kumanin wrote a receipt and, giving it to Bogomolov, asked:

- She died here, with you, and what did you do with her next?

- Everything is as it should be, - Nikolai Ivanovich explained, - they notified the police, sent a request to the place of residence, so that relatives would come. The answer was that there were no relatives. Then, according to the regulations, she was buried at the expense of the state, for which there is a receipt. Here, please.

Where did you bury her? Kumanin went cold.

"They sent them to Yaroslavl for cremation," Bogomolov answered quietly, as if he were seriously ill.

"To the cremation in Yaroslavl," whispered Kumanin. He showed the death certificate to Bogomolov:

So this is all that's left of her?

"Unfortunately," Nikolai Ivanovich agreed, "but don't forget, young man, that the same thing will happen to any of us. In our time to live to such a venerable age, you know. Why are you so upset. Is this your relative?

"No," the major replied with dry lips, "but I really needed her. He paused and added, "At least dead."

Kumanin got up, apologized to the doctors, thanked them for their assistance and left the office. Nikolai Ivanovich Bogomolov caught up with him.

"Wait a minute," he said, going up to Kumanin.

He looked questioningly at the pathologist.

"You know," Nikolai Ivanovich smiled, "when I was writing out the death certificate of this old woman, I found a photograph in her passport. I don't know why, but I left it. I did not hand over to the police along with my passport. Maybe it will be of use to you. Take.

Kumanin took the envelope handed to him and took out a small photograph - it depicts ... Alyosha Lisitsyn.

The photograph had a very strong effect. Kumanin was unable, apparently, to cope with his emotions, because Dr. Bogomolov asked:

- Are you okay? Perhaps you can get something to calm you down?

- Thank you, - Kumanin thanked wearily, - I have a seduxen. Thank you Doctor. And I also want to ask you not to tell anyone about my visit. And warn everyone. For your peace of mind. Otherwise, not only you yourself, but the whole hospital, even the whole city, can get into a very unpleasant story. Do you understand me?

"Of course," said Dr. Bogomolov, smiling, "I understand everything.

Kumanin went out into the street and sat down on a bench at the gate of the hospital in order to slightly comprehend everything that he managed to learn. Separate parts of the big puzzle gradually shifted, creating, if not complete, then at least a very colorful picture. I wonder what Klimov will say when Kumanin reports to him about his trip to Rostov. Or maybe not report anything to him at all, but keep quiet.

While Kumanin was trying to put his thoughts in order, a gray Volga stopped beside him, squealing with badly adjusted brakes. Three people jumped out of it. One glance was enough to understand that in front of him was the entire personnel of the local KGB, apparently alerted by Nina Lazarenko.

Demonstrating good professional training, all three - one in front, two a little behind - went to Kumanin, who was sitting on the bench.

"Captain Fomenko," the leader introduced himself, "are you from Moscow?" And he thrust a burgundy coat of arms under Kumanin's nose.

Without emotion, like a ship giving an identification signal, Kumanin showed his own.

Why didn't they contact us? Captain Fomenko asked with a claim in his voice.

"You have to come to work in the morning, and not in the afternoon," Kumanin answered him in the same tone.

"We were at a meeting in the city committee," Fomenko said peacefully. "If you are interested in Winkel, then I have deadly material on this Jew.

Poor Winkel probably "fed" the entire local KGB.

"Fomenko," Kumanin said in a low voice, "if you ever ask why I came to the hospital, then your next duty station will be the Asinovsky district of the Tomsk region.

"Understood," Captain Fomenko answered without any anger or embarrassment. - Do you need any assistance?

"Take me to the railway station," Sergei asked wearily.

Chapter 8

I

On the morning of the next day, when Kumanin arrived at the service, an emergency occurred in Lubyanka - a pipe burst in the personal toilet of General Klimov, in the rest room that adjoined his office ... The computer center located below the floor was flooded with water and out of order.

In the reception room of the general, Sergei saw ensign Svetlana, wet from head to toe, trying, in the best heroic traditions, to close the hole with her body. If it is possible to believe history, during the Patriotic War it was possible to do this with torpedo holes, but it didn't work out here. The water continued to whip, flooding the lower rooms, spreading through the dilapidated ceilings of the building of the pre-revolutionary insurance society "Russia".

The door to the office of General Klimov, which had never happened before, was wide open, and in the middle of it, in full uniform with a wrench in his hands, was the commandant of the Lubyanka, Colonel Spiridonov. He gave commands to two ensigns who fought in the toilet with the raging elements. All this was reminiscent of the struggle for survivability on a sinking ship.

The fact is that there were no plumbers in the Lubyanka, but not at all because; that the department turned out to be greedy and did not want to keep them on its balance sheet. The matter was much more serious.

Back in the late sixties and early seventies, in the depths of the CIA, an ingenious plan was developed to penetrate the most secret facilities of the Union. The CIA itself never thought of this, the idea was clearly suggested by one of the many defectors, renegades and other traitors who literally flooded the States. The essence of the operation, which received the code name "Gutter", which means "drainpipe" in English, was the following. It has long been noticed that on the blank fences of various secret objects that have neither windows nor doors, there are constantly hanging announcements inviting plumbers and plumbers to work (sometimes urgently). It was natural: the quality of plumbing systems was exactly the same both in a Khrushchev-built house and in some top-secret defense research institute or intelligence analytical center built back in the time of Comrade Stalin.

According to the documents of secret correspondence, the breakthrough of a sewer pipe in the Research Institute for the Development of Laser Weapons delayed the program for an "indefinite time." Usually, a specialist, be it a rocket scientist, a nuclear engineer, a bacteriologist, is checked for almost a whole year before being hired, finding out the names of his casual acquaintances, while a plumber is sometimes issued instantly, not very interested in his past. A hired plumber-plumberman has the right to enter any premises where even members of the Central Committee and ministerial commissions are not allowed. They do not even know about the existence of these premises, but the plumber does, because pipes leak and burst everywhere, even in the bunker of the General Secretary. To avoid accidents, plumbers are on duty at top-secret facilities and at night. Thus, an immense scope for reconnaissance and sabotage activities opens before them. That is why the CIA decided to introduce specialists under the guise of plumbers to various secret facilities of the Ministry of Defense, the State Security Committee and the Academy of Sciences, whose duty it would be to reveal the areas of work of these facilities. "Opening" was not difficult, walking around the whole day through the premises, in which plumbing accidents constantly occurred.

It is not known how far the CIA went in implementing this very ingenious plan, but all enemy plans were reliably thwarted. The mole recruited by the KGB, sitting in the leadership of the CIA, in whose hands a copy of the plan of Operation Gutter fell into his hands, immediately handed over these documents to Moscow, where they lay on the table to Yu. V. Andropov. The chairman of the KGB at that time puzzled over how the documents from his office immediately got into the editorial offices of Western newspapers. Reading the plans of the enemy, he was horrified. Steam heating radiators were constantly leaking in his office and in the waiting room, and the dearest uncle Vasya (a retired major, a participant in the war) and two of his henchmen could not fix the leaks. Yuri Vladimirovich did not even spare the government money and ordered Norwegian radiators, but they did not fit our pipes. Having learned how cunning the enemy was, Andropov barely suppressed the desire to order mass arrests of plumbers and plumbers working at closed enterprises and mailboxes. But it was necessary to find out how the enemy transmits the information received, and a secret directive flew to all parts of the country, ordering to organize surveillance of plumbers working at facilities of categories A-1, A-2 and A-3, and to reveal their connections. This action nearly brought the state security agencies of the country into a state of collapse. Due to the secrecy of this largest counterintelligence operation in the history of organs, not a single superfluous word was said in the directive so as not to expose the "mole". The provincial leadership, on the other hand, could not understand why the KGB personnel suddenly decided to switch from dissidents to native plumbers. And they demanded clarification from the Lubyanka, was there some kind of ideological sabotage here? It is generally not known how this case would have ended if foreign intelligence had not obtained new data, conclusively proving that the "mole" was slipped disinformation in order to divert the KGB forces from the fight against the anti-Soviet and switch to the fight against the proletariat. Andropov decided not to delve into the intricacies of the reconnaissance game proposed by the enemy. Now go and figure out which of the two messages of the "mole" is true, and which one is fake? "Mole" worked for money, and therefore transferred to Moscow everything that passed through his hands, without bothering to analyze. The KGB station in America, of course, did not see this "mole" in the eye, but only received messages from him through the mailbox system. But be that as it may, all the plumbers were compromised. In order to "finally resolve the issue", an instruction flew to the personnel departments of enterprises of these categories, which ordered the dismissal of all plumbers and plumbers from work and manages "on their own". However, this instruction was so vague, and plumbing accidents were so frequent, that the order was simply ignored at most facilities. The most executive bosses, in order to avoid the wrath of the Lubyanka, transferred their plumbers to an underground position, disguised as various "equipment mechanics" or "fire safety instructors."

But if on the periphery there was an opportunity to sabotage the order of the center, then in the very center, that is, in his own Lubyanka, Andropov brought complete order. All plumbers were kicked out ruthlessly, regardless of any past merit. After that, the Lubyanka flowed like the Titanic after a collision with an iceberg, and the essence of the sabotage conceived overseas seemed to be clear to many. By order of Andropov, some of the personnel of the commandant's battalion were turned into plumbers. To enter some rooms, say, the reception room of General Klimov (not to mention his office), a special permit was required. It was absolutely impossible for a conscript soldier to issue such a pass, so a special unit of plumbers was gradually formed in the commandant's battalion, consisting of foremen and ensigns of extended service. Overtime plumbers were distinguished by their diligence and readiness for self-sacrifice, which they now demonstrated in the toilet of General Klimov, but they suffered due to insufficient knowledge of the material part and the lack of the necessary skill in such a difficult job.

At the moment Kumanin appeared on the stage, the electrical wiring of the computer center sparked, which set off the automatic fire extinguishing system. As a result, the premises of the office for the registration of criminal cases located under the center were flooded. The women working there rushed out into the corridor with a screech. A complete mess ensued. Soldiers with buckets ran along the corridors. Someone decided that a fire had started and began to unwind fire hoses from hydrants. The ranks of the commandant's battalion cursed juicy, breaking the usual academic silence of the Lubyanka.

While Kumanin was pondering what to do in the resulting emergency situation, Army General Kryuchkov, accompanied by General Goncharenko, suddenly appeared in the open doorway of General Klimov's reception room.

General Goncharenko was a Chekist of the Yezhov conscription. In his younger years, he so deftly broke the nasal septum of those being interrogated with the help of ordinary pliers that he quickly attracted the attention of the leadership, and by the time Beria was executed, he already had a colonel. In Khrushchev's time, he was not expelled from the organs, but on the contrary, he was promoted to general and appointed deputy head of the economic and technical department. He was very fond of Andropov, who at meetings constantly repeated: "Here it is, our living history!" Over time, the general was transferred to the group of general advisers to the Chairman of the KGB. Unlike other "general advisers" who preferred to give advice by telephone from their own dachas, General Goncharenko, despite his advanced age, came to the office every day, always in full uniform. True, his form was somehow strange. It consisted of samples of the uniforms of the last three decades (he still wore a uniform with a standing collar), but was decorated with antique badges. The late Andropov, who knew a lot about this, more than once predicted that General Goncharenko would someday be killed by collectors. Although Andropov said this in jest, everyone looked with alarm at the brave old man, because recently, at the request of some collectors, a series of murders of retired generals and admirals swept through Moscow in order to steal their orders and signs. The murder of Admiral Kholostyakov, a war hero and holder of the English Order of the Bath, gained particular fame. But no one killed General Goncharenko. And now he accompanied the Chairman of the KGB as an adviser on the sabotage and sabotage activities of the enemy within the bodies. A major sabotage with the incapacitation of several units of the central administration was already evident.

Kumanin, in an elegant light gray suit with a white shirt and a fashionable tie against the backdrop of soiled and wet soldiers of the commandant's service, resembled the first secretary of the regional committee, who came to personally see the consequences of the flood in the area entrusted to him. Naturally, Kryuchkov's gaze immediately rested on Kumanin. The chairman of the KGB decided that this elegant comrade had been sent from the Central Committee, which had already been informed of the "catastrophe". Since Kryuchkov's gaze, having settled on him, did not go anywhere further, Kuma

taking some semblance of a stand at attention, he reported:

— Major Kumanin.

Surprise flickered across the face of the Chairman of the KGB.

- From what department? - he asked.

"I was seconded to General Klimov," Kumanin reported.

A thin stream of water flowed between him and Kryuchkov. From the Klimovsky toilet came the commandant's bass: "Yes, turn off this valve, your mother!" and the ensign's voice: "This is for hot water, Comrade Colonel. You can't turn it."

"Sabotage," General Goncharenko said, baring his metal teeth in a smile.

Kryuchkov's eyes continued to look at Kumanin.

— Klimova? asked the head of the KGB. - And where is Klimov himself?

Kumanin instantly assessed the whole situation. If the Chairman of the KGB is forced to ask an ordinary "opera" where one of his first deputies disappeared, although he could be seen on the TV screen, in Gorbachev's retinue at some ceremonial meetings in the West, Kumanin wisely decided that he was hardly supposed to know more than to the Chairman of the KGB, and therefore briefly and strictly according to the charter answered:

- I can not know!

"You don't know," Kryuchkov asked again, addressing himself rather than Kumanin, "how would you know, even if they don't know Gorbachev in the office." And in the secretariat of the Central Committee. Some disgrace! All heads of Departments fled. One is writing a dissertation, the other is generally unknown where. No one to work.

At the same time, Kryuchkov continued to look at Kumanin, and he decided that now he, like a commander on the battlefield, appointing a company commander as a division commander due to the decline in command personnel, would promote him, Kumanin, to the generals and appoint him head of department instead of deserted Klimov. But the Chairman of the KGB suddenly changed the subject.

Are you taking part in the liquidation? - he asked.

— In the liquidation of what? Kumanin dared to ask.

"In the liquidation of the accident," Kryuchkov explained in a monotone voice.

"Not at all," Kumanin reported.

"Then go somewhere," Kryuchkov ordered, "and don't interfere with people's work."

- Eat! Kumanin rapped out, heading into the corridor.

Behind him, Kumanin heard the mumbling voice of adviser Goncharenko, who advised Kryuchkov.

"Actually, you need to interrogate, as it should be.

— Major Kumanin! called Kryuchkov. Kumanin turned to face the authorities.

Have you ever used General Klimov's toilet? asked the Chairman of the KGB.

A personal toilet in the Lubyanka hierarchy sometimes meant much more than official titles and government awards. Kryuchkov himself had two of them.

"No," Kumanin admitted sincerely. Kryuchkov nodded approvingly.

"Of course, he's not supposed to," he said, turning to General Goncharenko, "and Klimov would never have allowed it. Everything is not so simple here.

The KGB chairman turned to Kumanin again:

- You can be free.

- Eat! - Kumanin answered again and flew out into the corridor like a bullet.

II

Order in the Lubyanka was gradually restored. True, the air raid bells were still squealing along the distant corridors, ringing because of the ingress of water into the electrical wiring. But no one paid any attention to them.

Having reached his office, Kumanin again realized that for the first time he wanted to find General Klimov in place and report on his trip to Rostov. "Although, if you look at it, what did he, in essence, learn by going to Rostov? That some old woman by the name of Romanova died there, and there are almost as many Romanovs in Russia as there are Ivanovs, Petrovs and Sidorovs, that Alyosha Lisitsyn, a grandson (or even great-grandson) who has become homeless, is sent to an orphanage. I wonder how Klimov will react to what he knows about Alyosha Lisitsyn. It is a pity, of course, that the old woman was not buried in Rostov, somewhere in the local cemetery. And so he had only a piece of paper left in his hands - a simple certificate of death, which proves absolutely nothing. And, of course, it would be necessary to tell this smart Theophilus about everything. What will he, with his mystical ravings about the predestination of all things, the Fatima miracle and the like, including the holy youth sent to the sinful earth to mark the end of the punishment imposed on Russia in 1917, sing? What an idiot! What will he say when he finds out that Kumanin figured out all these miracles in two hours. The kid came to the city on an excursion with his crazy and elderly (which is almost the same thing) grandmother. The grandmother accidentally died right on the excursion, the police picked up the boy, did not find any other relatives and sent him, as expected, to a boarding school for preschool children. Kumanin himself understood that the simplified scheme he had drawn up did not explain anything in this story, and the facts were somewhat rigged. After all, according to the testimony of Nina Lazarenko, the boy with whom the old woman came to the Kremlin and Alyosha Lisitsyn are completely different children. At the same time, the late citizen Romanova T.N. in the presence of Lazarenko, she called the baby spinning around her "Alyoshenka". Nina Lazarenko could be wrong. Let's say, a completely different boy came into her field of vision at that moment, or, busy talking with an annoying old woman who tried to penetrate the funds of the state museum, she did not notice the boy at all, and then refused to identify him for some reasons known only to her. This version is also supported by the photograph of Alyosha Lisitsyn in the passport of citizen Romanova T.N., discovered by the pathologist Bogomolov.

Of course, now it would be natural to send a request to the guys from the Tomsk region about this old woman.

The more Kumanin thought about this, the less convincing seemed to him almost all the facts he had obtained. The late old woman lived in the village of Romanovo, all the inhabitants of which

Polls could be Romanovs. Tatyana Nikolaevna, and Nikolai Alexandrovich, and Alexei Nikolaevich, in a word, the whole royal family could well have been among them.

Nevertheless, the thread leading to the wilds of the Tomsk region remained the only one, and it had to be used.

The mysterious grave of the colonel, who served in the pre-war years along with the mysterious opera Lisitsyn at Object 17, could tell something, on which Baba Dusya pointed him. She could have confused everything, and perhaps this is the grave of Lisitsyn himself, moreover, buried under his own name.

Kumanin got up and went to the special communication center located on the fifth floor of the east wing of the huge building. This site was guarded by officers of the "nine" in full uniform and with weapons. Officers of the 9th Main Directorate of the KGB, the so-called security department, whether they were in uniform or in civilian clothes, could be recognized at any distance and in any crowd - such a persistent genotype was developed by this service. The officers of the "nine" guarded the KGB itself and all especially secret objects. The most experienced and specially trained officers were entrusted with protecting dignitaries from the regional committees, the Central Committee, the Council of Ministers, as well as scientists and industry workers stuffed with secrets. Sometimes they depicted a jubilant crowd of workers around the General Secretary, a member of the Politburo or the secretary of the regional committee, when they communicated with the "people". More from the officers of the "nine" was not required. All the training was aimed at reducing their reflexes to one - the reflex of German Shepherds. Therefore, Kumanin always walked past them with some apprehension: will they bite or not?

The guard carefully read the order issued by General Klimov, measured Kumanin with a glance, comparing the photo on the identity card. With a movement of his head, he made it clear to Kumanin that he could pass and pressed several buttons of a cunning dial lock at once, so much so that Kumanin did not see a set of numbers. The guys knew the service! Sergei cautiously, with the intensity of a man expecting someone to grab hold of his coattails or trousers from behind, went through the steel door that had opened. But everything worked out, and Kumanin ended up in the holy of holies of the KGB - the "special communications center". What-what, and the special communication was delivered, as they say, at the level of the best world standards. From this room, filled with expensive foreign equipment and domestic equipment that never went into production, within a matter of minutes it was possible to contact any corner of the world, not to mention any hole in the vast Union. It was much easier to get through to the authorized KGB on Sakhalin (and the audibility was an order of magnitude better) than to get home, even if you lived in the very center of Moscow. When Kumanin had to visit the "special communications center", he was always seized by a certain reverent feeling, comparable only to the feelings of a zealous Catholic entering St. Peter's Church in the Vatican. True, today, after the well-known events in General Klimov's office, Kumanin's gaze moved anxiously along the ominous pipe running under the ceiling through all the rooms of this holy place. Having driven away gloomy forebodings, Kumanin got down to business. Tomsk responded instantly, and in just three minutes Kumanin was already talking to the head of the Asino city department, Lieutenant Colonel Mkrtchan.

The Asinovsky city department of the KGB had its roots in the special commandant's office of the NKVD, and therefore had to contain information about all residents of the controlled area. For some time the lieutenant colonel could not understand what Kumanin wanted from him.

"You're laughing at me, aren't you?" he shouted into the phone (although the audibility was excellent). - We have a whole village of the Romanovs, there are also the villages of Romanovskoye and Romanovka. There, consider, only the Romanovs live, and all are close and distant relatives. Come here for yourself and find out. We will provide all possible assistance. We have only six people in the city department, and

They have not been able to approve a new staffing table for two years now.

Lieutenant Colonel Mkrtchan clearly belonged to the number of people who hear only themselves. Such people are indispensable in the fabrication of fake cases (what I think I will write), it was extremely difficult to get useful information from them. Kumanin, however, turned out to be patient - he believed in the wisdom of the people's truth that "patience and work will grind everything." Colonel Mkrtchan also surrendered.

- A? he suddenly chimed in. "Old lady, you say? Which one died last year? What did you name her? Yes, exactly, Romanova Tatyana Nikolaevna. Well, I know her very well, dear! What are you interested in? The old woman was absolutely clean according to our part. I say exactly. I knew her personally. She was registered in Romanov, but lived here, in Asino. She taught French at school, worked at a music school. Everyone loved her very much. We did not have the means to transport her here to bury her. And then we would definitely...

"So," Kumanin interrupted him. "Where did she even come from?" Is she a native of your area?

- No, no, - answered the lieutenant colonel, - but he has been living with us for a very long time. She is from the administratively exiled. Even before the war. Are you sure you need a date? Wait a second, I'll tell you.

The case at Lieutenant Colonel Mkrtchan was put on coolly, because less than ten minutes had passed before he again appeared on the wire and reported:

"So listen. It was registered by the special commandant's office of the NKVD on March 23, 1941. Before that, she lived in the Moscow region, you have somewhere there, there is no exact address.

- Wonderful, - Kumanin responded, - is there an exact date of birth?

"So-so," Mkrtchan drawled, apparently skimming the registration card with his eyes, "there is no exact one. Here is the entry: June 1897.

- Was she married? Kumanin continued to draw out.

"As far as I know, no," replied the Lieutenant Colonel from Asino. - Lonely. Has no relatives abroad.

- And in the USSR? Kumanin asked.

- And in the USSR it seems not, - Mkrtchan said slowly, studying the card, - in any case, they are not marked. During the war, she temporarily worked in one of the Tomsk evacuation hospitals as a surgical nurse. He has a medal "For Valiant Labor in the Great Patriotic War." She presented herself with the title of "Honored Teacher of the RSFSR", but Moscow hacked to death in 1954. Education - the lieutenant colonel read in warehouses - philo-logical.

— Is that all? Kumanin asked, "is there any information about her parents?" Who was she anyway?

"There is nothing," Mkrtchan replied. - Dashes. She is one of the former, those who were sent here in batches before the war. Here is the place of birth: Leningrad.

- Maybe Petersburg? Kumanin tried to clarify.

"Petersburg, maybe," the lieutenant colonel agreed, "but it says "Leningrad."

"She's definitely one of the former," Mkrtchan continued, "she knew French, English. Except

In addition, she had a lot of remnants.

- Which ones? asked Kumanin, who loved precision.

"Mostly religious," the lieutenant colonel explained. "I was completely poisoned by this opium. We don't even have churches here. There were several wooden ones, but they were still broken before the war. There was one small church in Tomsk, that one was closed under Nikita Sergeevich. Romanova suffered from this. There were icons in her house. At one time they even wanted to turn her off work for this, but the regional committee stood up. Prevention was carried out so that she would not infect children with opium at school.

- Where did you live? Kumanin continued to clarify the details.

"At first she rented half a house in Romanovo," Mkrtchan said, "and then we gave her a one-room apartment in Asino, as a labor veteran. Here's something else. She was not a special settler, but an administrative deportee. Do you understand the difference?

"Vaguely," Kumanin admitted.

- In short, - Mkrtchan explained, - already in the mid-fifties she had the right to go to the mainland on vacation. And later, in general, she could go to the place where she was expelled from. Almost all administrative officers and special settlers who survived left. And she never even went on vacation. Strange?

"Very strange," Kumanin confirmed.

"Here, even before me, my comrades checked," the lieutenant colonel laughed, "whether she served in some SS Sonderkommando during the war. Do you remember, there was an "orientation" - those who shot prisoners and Jews hid in quiet corners and were afraid to even go on vacation so that someone would not accidentally recognize them. But the old woman lived here throughout the war.

"Interesting," Kumanin muttered.

"Last year," Mkrtchan continued, "she suddenly started to fuss and began to get ready for the mainland. We have a railway in Asino, so it's quite easy to leave, you first need to go to Tomsk, and then by passenger to you, to Moscow. I knew Romanova well, she taught my daughter French and how to play the piano. I ask: "Where are you, Tatyana Nikolaevna, going at your age? We would sit at home. Such a heat, stuffiness. What are you doing on the mainland? And she tells me that a relative of hers showed up, calling for a visit. Years, they say, are such that you will not have to see each other again. And then she said this phrase: "I prayed to the Lord all my life for only one thing, to let me live until 1988 and become a witness of the sign." "What sign?" I ask. "Signs that the Lord has forgiven Russia," she replies. "Again you," I say, "with your prejudices. Such a smart, educated woman, but you believe in all, excuse me, nonsense. Signs, predictions, priests, icons. I'm even surprised, I say. — Go, of course. I have no right to stop you. Thanks for all". She did not understand: "What are you thanking me for, Colonel?" For some reason she called me colonel all the time. "Yes, because you trimmed my daughter a little. She will soon enter the institute, she has learned something. "And thank you," she says, "for letting me live until this year." And why this year is special, I still do not understand. So, she went. And you see how it turned out.

Did she go alone? Kumanin asked. "Didn't anyone accompany her?"

- One of the former students accompanied her, - the lieutenant colonel answered, - but only as far as Tomsk, there he put him on the Moscow train.

"Understood," said Kumanin, "well, you can tell me the details about her life. With whom did you communicate? Have you corresponded with anyone? After her death, was there anything unusual found in her apartment?"

"Listen," Mrktchan admitted, "we practically didn't deal with it. The apartment was not examined. Maybe the district policeman looked around, but we didn't. If anything had been discovered in our unit, then, of course, they would have reported. Now it's probably too late to look for everything. If there were any letters or, say, postcards, then they have all been burned. The year has passed anyway."

"Yes," Kumanin sighed, "we found it late. A little earlier, they might still be alive. She probably had a lot to say..."

"Sorry," said Lieutenant Colonel Mrktchan. "I have no right to ask you questions. But, honestly, I can't understand: why do you need this old woman? What was she, a resident here? Just wondering."

The lieutenant colonel perfectly understood what they could do with him if the dearest old woman who taught his daughter French and music playing was a resident of some foreign intelligence, supplied this intelligence with information about the true state of affairs in distant timber industry enterprises, which the West had not had any information about before. slightest concept. After all, an employee from the Lubyanka was interested.

"No," Kumanin reassured him, "she wasn't any kind of resident, don't worry. It's just that in one case it crossed paths, perhaps purely by accident. I am clarifying this. You, for an hour, did not know a boy near her named Alyosha Lisitsyn? Redhead like that."

"I didn't know such a boy," replied the lieutenant colonel, "but in Tomsk, in the regional party committee, there was Lisitsyn Vasily Aleksandrovich. He worked as a second secretary. So he patronized her. Already dead. But he has children and grandchildren somewhere on the mainland. It seems to be in Riga. I don't know the details. It's you, if necessary, find out in Tomsk."

- How long ago did he die? Kumanin asked.

"Ten years have passed," Mrktchan specified. - He is still from the old Bolsheviks. For a long time, he started in party work, almost with Vladimir Ilyich. This old woman, by and large, was very strange: either they wanted to kick her out of work, then to put her in a mental hospital, then to send her to hell. And he always took her under protection, he personally visited her several times. We talked about something for a long time. After that, our party members left her alone."

"Good," Kumanin said. - I still may have questions for you, Mrktchan, then I'll call. In the meantime, I'll ask you to find out if there are any papers, documents, letters left after her. If so, then everyone went by special mail to the Lubyanka. Major Kumanin Sergey Stepanovich."

"I will try," Lieutenant Colonel Mrktchan assured.

REPORT OF MAJOR KUMANIN

"... The history of mankind knows many examples when, in the course of palace coups, political intrigues, rebellions and revolutions, representatives of new ruling dynasties or classes that came to power got rid of their predecessors first of all. In more ancient times, this was done through banal extrajudicial killings. Later, the judiciary, which, as a rule, was under the control of the new authorities, began to be involved in the process of eliminating the former rulers. For example, if extrajudicial killings were used in the late Middle Ages, especially frequent in England during the so-called Wars of the Roses, in France during the Huguenot wars and in Italy during the

rule of the Medici house, already starting from the process of Mary Stuart, there has been a steady tendency to carry out the physical destruction of the overthrown rulers within the framework of the criminal law that existed or exists in the country. The most characteristic and well-known examples in this area are: the trial of King Charles I Stuart during the years of the bourgeois revolution in England and the trial of King Louis XVI during the Great French Revolution. Both trials, as is known, ended with the death sentence being passed on the deposed kings. But regardless of the method of destroying the former rulers, extrajudicial or judicial, such actions have always been tried to be carried out publicly in the interests of the security and tranquility of the future government. So, the French king Henry III of Valois was stabbed to death by a religious fanatic sent by the conspirators, in front of all his guards and a large number of courtiers. The French king Henry IV of Bourbon was stabbed to death by a sent assassin in broad daylight in the center of the capital in front of the convoy accompanying him and numerous citizens. As for the monarchs sentenced to death, the execution of sentences was carried out publicly in the city squares with a confluence of a huge number of people. Such behavior of the new authorities was always dictated not by their love for spectacular mass spectacles, but by their concern for state security and the political stability of their own regime. The public execution of the overthrown and tried monarchs, as it were, symbolized the end of the old and the beginning of a new social order, it stopped various rumors, rumors and omissions both at home and abroad.

Characteristically, the execution of members of the royal house, as well as members of aristocratic families, was supposed to act as the main symbol of the victory of the world proletariat over the bourgeois-monarchist system. In many works of the founder of our party and state, primarily written before the Great October Revolution, there are constant references to the history of the French Revolution, in particular, to the guillotine, as the main factor in changing public consciousness.

After the victory of October, when the question of the future fate of the former Emperor Nicholas II arose, V. I. Lenin and all his associates were certainly convinced of the need for an open trial of Nicholas II. L. D. Trotsky, who was distinguished by the most striking oratorical abilities, was to act as the main accuser. The process was planned to be carried out similarly to the process of King Louis XVI, and to end with a death sentence, as well as a public execution. In this context, the term "public" should not always be understood as nationwide. For a number of reasons, V. I. Lenin, after coming to power, was forced to abandon executions in the squares following the example of the French Revolution, but during the execution of a number of sentences (for example, against Malinovsky, Beletsky, Manuilov, Andronnikov, etc.), the so-called working control was present a commission composed of representatives of the proletariat, elected by the workers' and soldiers' committees, as well as the necessary protocols and, if possible, medical reports were drawn up. However, nothing of the kind happened during the liquidation of the former Emperor Nicholas II and members of his family in Yekaterinburg in the summer of 1918; on the contrary, this whole action, or rather its description in the surviving documents, looks far-fetched and implausible. After the February Revolution, which led to the abdication and arrest of Nicholas II, a powerful campaign began to completely discredit him. The former monarch was declared personally responsible for Khodynka, on January 9, the defeat in the war with Japan, the suppression of the 1905 revolution with the help of punitive actions and courts-martial, the organization of Jewish pogroms, the Lena massacre, Russia's involvement in the first imperialist war and mediocre, criminal leadership of the troops in this war, which ended with the February Revolution.

On a personal level, the former tsar was also portrayed as a bloody despot, a drunkard, morally unscrupulous, capable of domestic murder, not to mention other crimes. The heavy defeats of the Russian army during the years of the imperialist war became possible due to

assurances of the press, due, on the one hand, to the criminal behavior of the emperor, on the other, to direct betrayal and almost espionage in favor of Germany. All of the above accusations, made and promoted during the reign of the Provisional Government (although the Extraordinary Investigation Commission appointed by the same government did not find a single confirmation of these accusations), were picked up and strengthened by the authorities after the October Revolution. It must be admitted that the numerous accusations brought against Nicholas II found a warm response among the people, who suffered unprecedented sacrifices for that time in the war, impoverished as a result of military requisitions, mobilization supplies and other government measures inevitable in wartime. Having suffered huge losses and humiliated by defeats, the army, from generals to millions of workers and peasants dressed in soldier's greatcoats, saw in the king the cause of all their troubles and agreed with the designation of the king - Bloody. The workers and peasants in the rear saw in this man the cause of their fallen standard of living, ruin and impoverishment. The small intelligentsia could not forgive Nicholas for military defeats, ministerial leapfrog and Grigory Rasputin, whose image was created by the press even before the February Revolution, and his significance was greatly exaggerated.

It was these charges that were supposed to be presented to Nicholas II at the planned trial. According to available data, many crimes of the tsarist regime, starting with the execution of the Decembrists, were supposed to be brought as charges. According to the organizers of the trial, Nicholas I should have been responsible for them as the legal successor of the system of autocratic rule in Russia.

Of course, even a small part of the listed charges would be enough for Nicholas II to be sentenced to death, as was intended by the organizers of the failed trial. After the tsar moved from Tobolsk to Yekaterinburg, where the bulk of the population were factory workers, propaganda against the person of Nicholas II began to take on the character of hysteria. Workers at numerous rallies demanded the "immediate execution of the crowned executioner." Moreover, the mood of these rallies was so furious (taken from the Yekaterinburg newspapers of the time) that the representatives of the local authorities (Goloshchekin, Beloborodov, etc.) had to use every possible means, from persuasion to the threat of the use of force, to extinguish the raging passions, constantly referring to the upcoming "revolutionary judgment" over the former king.

Such behavior of the authorities not only did not extinguish the "anti-tsarist hysteria", but, on the contrary, led many to believe that the authorities were simply protecting the former tsar from "the just retribution of the people." Calls to break into the so-called House of Special Purpose (known as the Ipatiev House), where the former tsar and his family were kept, began to sound louder and louder in order to carry out their own judgment on them. One of these rallies, which took place in the immediate vicinity of the House of Special Purpose, the Red Army soldiers were forced to disperse with the use of force. At the same time, 2 people were injured and 7 arrested. The authorities responded by building an additional fence with barbed wire around the House of Special Purpose, strengthening security and deploying towers with machine guns. Later, they tried to explain this event by the existing danger of the release of the tsar by "monarchist conspirators" (on whose behalf Yurovsky composed notes and passed them to the tsar through his agents). More plausibly, these measures to strengthen security look like an attempt to protect the king and his family from possible mob lynching. Such isolation of the House of Special Purpose from the outside world convinced the working committees even more that the authorities wanted to save "Nikolai the Bloody" from a well-deserved punishment and were only waiting for the right moment to take him out of Yekaterinburg to a safer place. The Yekaterinburg Railway Workers' Committee officially warned the authorities that it would not allow this.

During this period, the unexpected change of almost all the guards of the House of Special Purpose, when the commandant Avdeev was replaced by Yurovsky, added to the tension.

A new guard, for the most part consisting of foreigners, was sent from Moscow after Philip Goloshchekin's trip there, conferring with V. I. Lenin and Ya. M. Sverdlov. Unfortunately, it is difficult to determine on what exactly the conviction of the working committees was based that the tsar was being saved from well-deserved retribution and was going to be taken out of the city, but the authorities could no longer ignore this factor. Fairly extensive explanatory work was carried out with the workers about the "inevitability of retribution", but at the same time, workers' pickets near the House of Special Purpose were ruthlessly dispersed or arrested.

Under these conditions, the unexpected announcement of the authorities that on the night of July 16-17, 1918, the tsar, his entire family and all the people from his retinue were shot, looks strange even today, and in those days in Yekaterinburg was met with frank distrust. Knowing the mood in the city, the authorities, which would have been completely in the spirit of the times, having received an order from Moscow or having independently decided on the need to destroy the royal family, should have warned the working committees about the upcoming execution, invited them to choose a "working control commission" to be present at the specified stock. Even if, for some incomprehensible reason, the authorities considered it impossible for this commission to be present at the execution itself, they should have presented the corpses of the victims to the commission (and even to everyone) immediately after the execution of the sentence in order to avoid further accusations against them, spreading rumors and reducing general tension in the city, especially since the troops of the directory were approaching it, turning it into a front-line one. However, nothing of the kind was done. Moreover, to explain what happened, a not very plausible version was put forward about the dissolution of corpses in hydrochloric (according to other versions - in sulfuric) acid, in sawing and burning the remains, dismembering them with axes, etc. with the subsequent burial of everything that remains, in some secret place. As evidence of the deed, only paper was presented - a demand for Comrade Beloborodov to receive barrels of sulfuric acid at one of the industrial enterprises of the city. Forensic experts, however, believe that in order to dissolve the 11 corpses, not a barrel was needed, but at least a railway tank with acid. All this was told to the working committees, which demanded that the corpses of those executed be presented to them, and, naturally, did not inspire any confidence at all. In Yekaterinburg, everyone was sure that the tsar and those accompanying him had been taken somewhere from the front-line city. It was precisely the fact that enemy troops were approaching Yekaterinburg that prevented the workers from dealing with such a crude and blatant deception on the part of the authorities on their own.

The latter could absolutely not answer the simplest questions, namely: why did the execution itself have to be carried out in such secrecy, if the next morning it was announced publicly? Why was it necessary to destroy the corpses of the executed so urgently, if the very fact of their concealment led to complications between the authorities and their main social base - the revolutionary workers? How did they manage to destroy all 11 corpses so quickly?

When asked how they managed to destroy 11 corpses using the means declared by the authorities, Voikov and Goloshchekin answered: "Maybe for someone it was impossible, but we, imagine, succeeded."

To the request to present what was left of the corpses, the answer followed: "Nothing is left, comrades. Absolutely nothing. And there's nothing left to show because there's nothing left of them

Nothing".

All this looked extremely unconvincing even for semi-literate workers. Many returned from the fronts of the world war and could be convinced that no explosion or fire could destroy a person so that "absolutely nothing" was left of him.

After parts of the White Army and the rebellious Czechoslovak corps entered the city, a commission of inquiry was appointed to investigate the circumstances of what happened in the Ipatiev House on the night of July 16-17, 1918. Nametkin, an investigator for the most important cases of the Yekaterinburg District Court, was appointed to lead the investigation. Being an experienced investigator, Nametkin, immediately after a cursory examination of the scene, stated that an imitation of execution had taken place in the Ipatiev House and that not a single member of the royal family had been shot there. Since this opinion of Nametkin was not shared by other members of the commission, in particular, the chairman of the commission, Colonel Sherekhovskiy, and the chairman of the Yekaterinburg District Court, Kutuzov, Nametkin resigned, but remained firmly convinced. He officially repeated his point of view in Tomsk, where he gave several interviews on this topic to foreign, mainly American, correspondents. Nametkin stated that he had evidence that the royal family was not killed on the night of July 16-17; and was going to publish this evidence soon. However, a week after this statement, Nametkin was killed, and the house where he rented a room was burned, which led to the death of the entire investigative archive.

After Nametkin left, the investigation team was headed by investigator Sergeev, who came to exactly the same conclusions as Nametkin. Sergeev was also removed from the leadership of the investigation and soon died under circumstances that were not fully clarified. The third investigator who headed the commission to investigate the circumstances of the death of the royal family was Sokolov, who had already been appointed by the regime of Admiral Kolchak.

For rather political reasons, Admiral Kolchak and General Diterichs, who headed the commission of inquiry, instructed investigator Sokolov to concentrate his attention on the fact of the murder of the royal family and to conduct the investigation in this direction, that is, to start from the fact of the murder as if it had happened.

Investigator Sokolov, during the short time at his disposal, did a gigantic amount of work, demonstrating his brilliant abilities as a forensic criminologist of the old Russian school. Details of what was done can be found in the book he wrote later, *The Murder of the Royal Family*. However, despite all efforts, Sokolov failed to find a single corpse.

It has now become known that investigator Sokolov, knowing about the conclusions of his predecessors and being no less experienced investigator than they, conducted two parallel investigations: one on the fact of the murder of the royal family, as ordered by Admiral Kolchak and General Diterikhs, the second on the fact the disappearance of the royal family from Yekaterinburg, as professional experience and duty dictated to him. Later, having emigrated to France, investigator Sokolov tried to summarize the results of his parallel investigation and make them public in a special work. However, on November 23, 1924, he was found dead at his home in the French town of Salbri. Although the official version says that Sokolov died of a ruptured heart at the age of 42, there is an opinion that he was killed. At the same time, many important documents prepared by Sokolov for publication disappeared.

These documents were discovered very recently in the Manuscript Library at the University of California, Berkeley. How they got there is not clear. The primary processing of these documents by American historians showed that the investigator Sokolov managed to trace and document the fact of the evacuation of the royal family from Yekaterinburg to Perm, and from there to Kazan.

All of the above, as well as a number of other facts that I do not want to overload my report with, led me to the following conclusions, which form the basis of my further actions:

1. According to all legal laws, the last Russian Emperor Nikolai Alexandrovich Romanov, his wife Alexandra Fedorovna Romanova, their children - Olga, Tatiana, Maria, Anastasia and Alexei Nikolayevich Romanov - cannot be considered killed, since there is no evidence of the murder, except for the statement persons who allegedly committed the murder, which is not proof in any country of the world, including the USSR. The bodies were not found, no forensic medical examination was carried out, and there are no independent witnesses to this crime. In accordance with the Criminal Law, the king and his family can only be considered missing.

2. Based on this, I put forward an investigative hypothesis that the royal family was not killed in Yekaterinburg and therefore could not have been buried there.

In my search, I excluded Sverdlovsk and the Sverdlovsk region from the scope of operational-search activities.

III

Major Kumanin, like most KGB operatives, rarely had to wear a military uniform, except when going on duty or about to be photographed with a new ID. And I must say that Sergei Kumanin, unlike, say, the same General Klimov, did not suffer from this. On the contrary, he experienced tension when, for one reason or another, he had to get into his uniform. These were the usual sufferings of a civilian, which, in essence, remained Kumanin. If he changes into a uniform in office, countless jokes from his colleagues cannot be avoided: "Seryozha, what, the war has begun!?", "Kumanin, are you going to the Kremlin for an order?" or "Seryozha, have you been appointed head of the guard at the mausoleum?" And in the same vein. But this time the form was necessary. Kumanin decided to go to the military unit, on the territory of which, according to Baba Dusi, there was an old monastic cemetery, where some chief from Object 17 was buried. Appearing on the territory of a military unit in civilian clothes meant getting bogged down in an incomprehensible and tedious conversation with the army command, on which a civilian suit acted just like a red rag on a bull, no matter what documents were presented. The same documents, in combination with a military uniform, acquired a triple penetrating power. So he folded his uniform trousers and tunic and stuffed them into the briefcase. There was no place for a cap. I had to take a plastic bag, in which everyone usually carried the so-called additional rations and shove combat armor there, and leave the cap in the diplomat. The form, however, was pretty crumpled, but Kumanin decided to iron it at home, all in accordance with the plan.

Hoping to quickly finish his business with the military, Kumanin planned at the same time to go to Nefedovo to Theophilus and share with him information about Alyosha Lisitsyn and his probable grandmother, obtained in Rostov. Here, of course, a military uniform would only interfere, but it was necessary, as usual, to choose the lesser of two evils. The trip to the military unit was seen as much more important than the meeting with Theophilus, which could not have taken place at all due to lack of time.

Kumanin found out ahead of time that an air defense division, which is part of the capital's anti-missile defense system, was stationed at the indicated place. The rules required him to contact the special department of the division in advance and act in close cooperation with them. But, having started a completely incomprehensible game without rules, Kumanin decided to neglect the rules even now. The hunting passion inherent in every operative told him that he, albeit by accident (although, by and large, there are no accidents in the world), went on the right track, and this track led to "Object 17". Depending on what he could find in the old monastic cemetery, Kumanin had to break through to the object itself with the help of a reasonable combination of arrogance, military uniform and General Klimov's instructions.

Form Kumanin went. A cap with a high crown and a blue band gave his broad face elements of nobility. The tunic, intercepted by the commander's belt with a harness, made the whole figure more slender and impressive.

Sergei was pleased with himself. By Monday, when he was supposed to meet with General Klimov, he would apparently have something to report and surprise him with. The meeting was scheduled for Monday, it was still Thursday, and it seemed to Kumanin that he had plenty of time at his disposal. He even managed to more or less reassure Nadia's parents, saying that Nadia was alive, but could not contact them because of the disgusting state of the telephone connection in the place where she was. At the same time, he was extremely surprised and delighted to learn that on the eve of practically the same information, an unfamiliar male voice, who introduced himself as "Nadya's work comrade", had transmitted almost the same information to his parents by phone.

There was only one man in the boarding school - the always drunk supply manager, who, of course, was not Nadia's comrade. Kumanin no longer doubted that the disappearance of the girl was connected with the removal of Alyosha Lisitsyn from the boarding school. Apparently, the boy did not want to deal with any of the kidnappers and demanded "Aunt Nadia", and those, knowing that they were responsible for the baby with their heads, were forced to deliver this aunt Nadia to him, violating at least a dozen articles existing in the Soviet Union legislation.

Thinking in this way, Kumanin drove the car along the Simferopol highway to the turn, the coordinates of which he specified at the Lubyanka. Resolutely turning the car to the left under the "brick", Kumanin, after a hundred meters, as expected, ran into a blank fence, decorated with iron sliding gates with somewhat faded red stars - the hallmark of any military unit in the system of the Ministry of Defense. A checkpoint was pushed up to the gate, the door of which was open. On the threshold, attracted by the noise of the engine of the Kumanin car, an ensign appeared with a red armband on duty at the checkpoint (checkpoint).

Kumanin turned off the engine, got out of the car and headed for the checkpoint. The ensign put his hand on the cap:

- Ensign Berezyuk, duty officer at the emergency checkpoint. What is the purpose of your visit, Comrade Major?

It turns out that it was a spare checkpoint. So, somewhere there is also the main one.

"I would like to talk to the commander of the unit," Kumanin saluted in response.

— With the division commander? the lieutenant was surprised.

"Exactly," Kumanin confirmed.

The ensign went inside the post and began to make phone calls. About ten minutes later, a faceless captain appeared, introducing himself as an assistant on duty in the unit. He studied Kumanin's documents and said lazily:

- Follow me.

Kumanin expected that a special officer would come running to the ensign's call, but, fortunately, this did not happen. Kumanin broke the rules, but they were not respected at all in the division.

Accompanied by the captain, passing along barracks-type buildings decorated with posters calling for increasing the number of excellent students in combat and political training and giving a crushing rebuff to any aggressor, Kumanin found himself at the four-story headquarters building. Next to it stood an invariable bust of Lenin and a stand with photographs of members and candidates for membership in the Politburo was set up.

The operational duty officer for the division, Lieutenant Colonel Antonenko, did not hide his anxiety.

- The general ordered me to find out on what issue you came to the division, comrade major?

"On an issue that is an official secret," Kumanin answered modestly, making it clear that he did not intend to talk with the operational duty officer.

"If you are talking about a sawmill," the lieutenant colonel did not let up, "then we have permission from the Ministry of Defense for this.

The division, apparently, was already tormented by the military prosecutor's office for an underground enterprise, which, judging by the question, is engaged in the production of lumber.

"Calm down," Kumanin smiled, "I had no idea that on the territory of your unit there is a sawmill.

But the lieutenant colonel, instead of calming down, became even more alarmed:

"Maybe our guys messed something up?"

- This is the business of your special officers, - Kumanin began to get annoyed, - Comrade lieutenant colonel, it seemed to me that you had read the order. I have an important government assignment, and you are obliged to provide me with all possible assistance, as far as possible without asking questions. I'm waiting for your instructions on which floor the division commander's office is located.

The lieutenant colonel turned purple, but his genetic memory told him how dangerous it was to irritate the KGB officers, he also knew that the KGB major was equal in rank to the commander of the Red Army, that is, he was the person who had the right to give orders to army lieutenant colonels. Therefore, the operational duty officer, overpowering himself, said something similar to "Yes!" and ordered a young soldier with a bayonet on his belt to escort Kumanin to the reception room of the divisional commander.

Major General Petrunin, if he was older than Kumanin, then no more than five to seven years. He turned out to be taut and broad-shouldered, with sharp features, like the movie heroes of the Civil War - Chapaev's hat and cloak were asking for his head and shoulders. And just as Chapaev disliked Furmanov at their first meeting, so the general immediately made it clear to Kumanin that he was dissatisfied with the appearance of a KGB major in his office.

"Is the question really so important," he asked, "that it is necessary to disturb the division commander, is it not possible to solve it at the level of the "special department"?"

"I'm afraid you can't," Kumanin replied, to whom the general did not offer to sit down, and the military uniform prevented him from doing so without an invitation.

"I hear you, major," the general said dryly, putting all his contempt into the word "major", in the hope that Kumanin would appreciate his own insignificance.

"On the territory of your unit," Kumanin reported, "there is a dilapidated chapel. Once there was a cemetery of a monastic skete. I need to see this place.

Genuine anxiety flickered in the eyes of the division commander, and an expression of some confusion appeared on his resolute face. He clearly wasn't expecting this.

- For what? the general asked and added. - What are you standing for? Sit down.

Kumanin sat down on a chair.

"I need to inspect this place," he replied, "as part of the assignment received from the leadership, but it did not give me the authority to reveal the essence of the assignment received.

It was a little intricate, but quite clear. This answer completely upset the general. Now he did not resemble Chapaev, but the store manager, to whom the committee of workers' control had raided.

"Comrade major," the general said after a pause, apparently wanting to once again emphasize the bottomless abyss that separated him and Kumanin, "I officially declare to you that we acted in full accordance with the instructions of the Ministry of Defense and the instructions of the Commander-in-Chief of the USSR Air Defense Forces.

It was clear that the general was telling the pure truth, although Kumanin did not understand the implication. However, he knew how to play such games.

"Comrade General," he answered with respect in his voice, "I have no doubt that you acted within the framework of the order received, but I must personally verify this and submit a report to my leadership that no initiative was allowed. You understand, a lot depends on what I write. If everything is exactly as you say, Comrade General, then ... - Kumanin is embarrassed

hesitated.

- Means what? the general asked.

"That means," Kumanin explained, continuing to smile embarrassedly, "you won't be punished, in any case, you won't be punished severely. I want you to understand everything correctly. I am not the commander of a rocket and artillery battalion, but a KGB officer, Major Kumanin, to whom you are obliged to assist without asking questions. Once again I ask you, Comrade General, to pay attention to the signatures of the persons who authorized me to inspect the place near the old chapel. It is to these persons that you can complain about me if you find anything offensive in my behavior. In the meantime, give me an escort and a car so I can look around the place.

"They promised us containers, special containers," the general said, biting his lips, "they promised us to ensure the export, but they didn't do anything. Then we had to..." The general fell silent.

"I understand you," Kumanin reassured the division commander, "the high command is to blame for everything, to which you were forced to obey in order to ensure the process of combat training of the division entrusted to you, and at the same time the security of our Motherland.

A graduate of MGIMO who was trained as a diplomat is not a former cadet of a provincial artillery school! Very intrigued by the conversation with the division commander, from which he understood absolutely nothing, except that the division was Red Banner, Kumanin, accompanied by the head of the chemical service and two soldiers, went to the old chapel.

The area occupied by the air defense division, at first glance, was equal to the territory of Belgium, no less. Indeed, there was a spare checkpoint near the Simferopol highway, and it was even difficult to find out where the main one was. Kumanin would not have been at all surprised if he had left the main checkpoint for Leningradskoye or Yaroslavskoye highways: at least two railway lines passed through the territories of the units. The soldiers unloaded the wagons and loaded them. Military trucks darted along the driveways, stuffed with boards and some tricky stuff under tarpaulins. There were mysterious buildings of an unclear purpose, but clearly of an industrial nature. And although posters like "Rocket Warrior! Vigilantly guard the peaceful labor of the Soviet people! ", The missiles themselves are nowhere to be found

was seen. Perhaps they were well camouflaged.

Having traveled seven kilometers, the headquarters jeep turned onto a country road and stopped at a shield on which a skull and crossbones were drawn and the inscription: "Attention! Dangerous area!".

"You can't go any further," Major Nachkhim sighed, "you have to walk and wear gas masks."

- What's the news? Kumanin was outraged. - In what gas masks? Where did you take me?

- Where ordered, - said the nachkhim, - you wanted to examine the place near the chapel. It's not far from here, about half a kilometer.

- Why gas masks? - Kumanin pulled on a gas mask for the last time at a military training camp at the institute and did not retain any pleasant memories of this. The main thing that I remember is that nothing is visible in the gas mask.

"I thought you were aware," the nachhim said uncertainly. "Didn't the commander warn you?"

The division commander talked a lot, but essentially said nothing, apparently believed that Kumanin was in the know.

"He didn't tell me anything about gas masks," Kumanin replied.

— How so? - objected the chief. - I should have warned you.

And the nachkhim told Kumanin the following story. When the division was re-equipped with new missiles, the old ones were supposed to be taken out for disposal. Prior to that, they were ordered to lay down on the ground, just for this purpose they chose the territory near the abandoned cemetery, since it is located quite far from military camps and combat positions of the division. In addition, one of the railway lines comes here, where a special reloading point is equipped. However, no transport was sent for the old missiles, and they continued to lie under a tarpaulin right on the ground. Gradually the tarpaulin was also stolen. From the rockets came fuel containing dichloroethane and other highly toxic components. He, nachkhim, repeatedly wrote reports addressed to the division commander, he turned to higher headquarters, but for five years now everything has remained as it was. Grass does not grow in this area now and some of the trees have dried up. Vapors are coming. Several soldiers had to be hospitalized. One of them died. This was also reported to the top, but again no effect. Meanwhile, the components of the fuel, decomposing, go into the ground, and soon with groundwater they will fall into the river, which is only a few kilometers away. Then an ecological catastrophe will break out, everyone will fall under the tribunal, and he, the chief, will be the first. He has two more years to serve until retirement, otherwise he would have left long ago.

Kumanin, listening to the nachkhim, tried to figure out what permissions from the Ministry of Defense the division commander had told him about, but he did not guess. He was sure that General Petrunin would have enough "excuses" to cover himself and substitute the nachkhim if something happened. Everyone plays similar games according to the same rules, sacrificing majors and saving generals for the tribe.

At this time, a soldier, sent by the major, returned from the supply room by the road. He had two respirators in his hands (fortunately, not gas masks). Thus, he made it clear to the officers that he himself did not intend to go there.

It was hard to breathe in the respirator, and Kumanin rebelled, suggesting that from one

there is nothing wrong with visiting.

"It hasn't rained for a long time, maybe it will manage.

- As you wish, - the nachkhim answered, - and I will go in a respirator. In which case, I have two witnesses that you yourself refused. And he pointed to the soldier and the driver.

Kumanin wanted to tell him that he would prefer to have more reliable witnesses, but kept silent and said:

- Went!

Seeing how reluctantly the nachkhim, dressed in a respirator, follows his call, Kumanin took pity and, looking through the dried trunks of trees, the red-brick ruins of an ancient chapel, said:

"You can stay here, I can handle everything on my own.

Nachkhim readily agreed, although, for sure, he had the order of General Petrunin to carefully monitor all the actions of Kumanin and submit a special report on this matter. But the major wanted more to reach retirement.

The landscape that opened before Sergey looked more like scenes from a movie about the end of the world, where a bloodthirsty virus brought from space destroyed all of humanity at the very height of its creative activity.

Around the surviving ruins of a small chapel, like giant larvae of monstrous insects, dozens (if not hundreds) of anti-aircraft missiles, some with warheads, lay with their bellies torn open. From torn hulls and broken or open hatches, cables and multi-colored wires adorned with cunning connectors hung like spilled guts. Some kind of crimson liquid, very reminiscent of blood, flowed from the rockets to the ground. In some places the liquid was green or green-yellow.

Behind the withered trees and bushes, a railway line was guessed - an open platform was visible, from which three soldiers in gas masks dumped gravel. There was a smell of burnt rubber, and Kumanin was already beginning to regret that he had abandoned the respirator.

Walking carefully, he walked around the chapel, trying not to step on what was left of the former anti-aircraft power of the USSR. The remnants of the rockets rose in small islands among the shimmering crimson green puddles of the ominous liquid that had once served as rocket fuel.

But in all this nightmare there was also a positive side - the old hermit's cemetery behind the chapel was not overgrown with lush grass, weeds and bushes, was not covered with several layers of rotten leaves, and its monastic simplicity appeared before Kumanin in all its mystical nakedness. On some graves there were even intact crosses, although on most they were knocked down, apparently simply out of hooligan motives, lying between the graves under a pile of wires, connectors and the remains of printed circuits. On the broken tombstones, one could still read individual letters of the Slavic script, which once burned with gold and perpetuated the names of schemers and mourners, now forgotten forever.

The cemetery was small - no more than twenty abandoned mounds. The skete probably did not last more than thirty or forty years before the wheel of history ran over it like a steamroller.

Kumanin looked around the graveyard, trying to find the grave he was looking for. He became uncomfortable

yourself from the oppressive silence of the extinct space. He walked a few more steps forward and, finally, he didn't even see, but felt that he had found exactly what he had to get into a military uniform for in the morning. On one of the graves, by some miracle, grass was preserved and two

red carnations.

This small green mound was sandwiched between two old graves of hermits, whose lopsided crosses, as it were, bent over him. Kumanin stepped closer. In a small hollow between the graves lay a rusted-through pyramid, similar to those that adorn the graves of poor people, whose funerals were taken over by the trade union community. Usually such pyramids are crowned with stars, but there was nothing on this one, or maybe it had decayed long ago. The pyramid itself retained its shape only thanks to four squares made of some kind of durable material.

Forgetting all the warnings of the nachkhim, Kumanin leaned over and picked up the pyramid, feeling it crumble under his fingers. At that moment, something fell at his feet. Kumanin shuddered. A small tablet, either copper or brass, darkened by dirt and age, ripped off the rotten screws that fastened it to the pyramid, emitted a sound that seemed strangely sharp to Kumanin.

The plaque was small, slightly larger than those that adorn the doors of old apartments. Taking out a handkerchief, Kumanin held it up, trying to read the name, more likely stamped than engraved by someone's not very skillful hand. Then, wrapping the sign in a handkerchief, he slipped it into his jacket under his belt and carefully began to climb back out.

The commander of the division was right. No sooner had Kumanin left the highway in the direction of Nefedov, than he felt a strange pain in his eyes and a slight dizziness. Then it got stuck in my throat. He even stopped for a few minutes to recover a little. The heat that had been there since morning began to subside. The northeast wind intensified, catching up clouds and promising long-awaited rain. All around him, the tops of the trees that lined the highway rustled in the wind.

Kumanin got out of the car and put his heated head under the refreshing stream of wind, breathing deeply. It is a pity that there was nowhere to rinse your face. It became a little easier, and Kumanin went on. A few minutes later, a police post appeared at the turn to Object 17. Three "traffic cops" stood on the side of the road, smoking cigarettes and talking about something. It seemed to Kumanin that at the sight of his car, one of them spat out a cigarette butt and began to say something into the transmitter hanging on his chest. Apparently it was just a coincidence. Since Kumanin was in uniform, the traffic police did not react to him in any way, and one inspector even saluted.

When Kumanin stopped his car at Feofil's house, it was already drizzling with rain, rapidly gaining strength. Holding his cap in his hand, Kumanin got out of the car. Under the invigorating jets from heaven, which gave him pleasure, he knocked on the door.

Theophilus was not at home - he left for Moscow in the morning, warning his mother that he would stay there for two or three days. Kumanin asked her where to find Theophilus in Moscow. She replied that she had no idea and, in general, was not very interested in her son's affairs, although she knew the address. "Apparently, in my uniform, I remind Klavdia Ivanovna of the district police officer who torments Theophilus all the time," thought Kumanin. But he was mistaken - he reminded Klavdia Ivanovna of a completely different person.

"The information he obtained at the location of the division of General Petrunin more than covered an unsuccessful trip to Theophilus," Sergei decided. - Just think, some extra twenty kilometers there, twenty back. You need to talk to Theophilus,

"I'll summon him to my place."

That is why, putting his cap on his head, wet from the rain, Kumanin, apologizing, headed for the exit, rejoicing at the downpour rustling in the yard. The head was heavy, the face continued to burn, however, pain in the eyes had passed.

"Young man," Klavdia Ivanovna suddenly turned to her. - Sorry. May I ask you one question?

"Yes, please," Kumanin replied, "what's the matter?"

"Tell me," the old woman said embarrassedly, "you didn't have anyone in your family named Agathon.

— Agathon? Kumanin was surprised. - My paternal grandfather's name was Agafon Ivanovich, but what?

"You look very much like him," Klavdia Ivanovna continued, even more embarrassed, "as if he were the spitting image of him.

- What are you talking about? Kumanin did not understand. Who do I look like?

"To her grandfather," Feophila's mother explained, "Agafon Ivanovich Kumanin." Here on whom.

Before Sergei had time to take in what was said, Klavdia Ivanovna disappeared into the room and quickly returned, carrying an old photograph on a passe-partout with an intricate vignette from some prehistoric photo studio.

The first thing that caught Kumanin's eye was a faded silver inscription: "Shiptser's photograph in Serpukhov. Gold medal of the Nizhny Novgorod fair in 1913. The picture showed a man in his thirties wearing a frock coat and elaborate tie. A massive chain adorned his waistcoat, and there was an incomprehensible badge on his frock coat. The man sat on a chair with a high carved back, holding two babies on his lap, dressed in something white and airy. With great amazement, Kumanin recognized in this man ... himself! Indeed, the resemblance was amazing! If he had any doubts, they were dispelled by Claudia Ivanovna.

"This is me," she pointed to the child sitting on her left knee, "and this is the son of Agafon Ivanovich, Steepochka. Your father, probably.

To say that Kumanin was shocked is to say nothing. He wanted to say something, but no words came to mind. He probably looked very bewildered, because Klavdia Ivanovna asked sympathetically:

- What's wrong with you? Did you not know this? Sit down please. What are you worth? She was afraid that Kumanin would fall now.

Kumanin sat down heavily on a stool, took off his cap, and, not quite realizing what he was saying, asked hoarsely: "Who are you?"

Claudia Ivanovna said that she was the daughter of Ivan Arsenyev, co-owner of Agafon Kumanin in the steamship company, an experienced river captain who drove ships along the Oka, Kama and Volga all the way to Makhachkala. Agafon Kumanin and Ivan Arseniev had children in the same year: the first had a son, the second had a daughter. Companions planned to marry them in the future and intermarry. How serious it was, it's hard to say now. After the death of Kumanin - he was drowned by the Chekists in a barge along with others - Ivan Arsenyev, stuck in Astrakhan, returned to Kumanino and tried to find Styopa, but he himself was arrested. Returned in 1925

completely ill, died in 1934.

"And, thank God," Klavdia Ivanovna finished, "if he had lived another two or three years, they would have taken it again. When my mother and I were arrested, at first the main charge was that my father was a co-owner of a shipping company.

Kumanin was silent, continuing to look at his own face, captured in an old photograph almost half a century before his birth. He suddenly became afraid. He imagined how they grabbed him, twisting his arms behind his back, dragged him out of the house, led him with rifle butts and bayonets to the pier, where they threw him into the dirty and smelly hold of an old barge. They throw them on a pile of living and dead people already lying there, groaning, begging for mercy, screaming in horror and misunderstanding: "For what fault are they subjected to mass extermination?! What catastrophe happened in their country, what kind of regime seized power in it, why is all the best that was in Russia subject to destruction? Here hatch covers fall with a creak and clang, and the light will forever fade for those who are in the hold. Only water gurgles overboard. This murmur grew louder and louder, tearing the hearts and lungs of the doomed. The rain intensified.

"Will you give me this photograph?" Kumanin asked, waking up.

"No," she said, "I won't. Why do you need her?

"I would like to show it to my father," Kumanin said, "because he doesn't know anything either, except that his father disappeared at the very beginning of the civil war.

"Let Stepan come and see me," suggested Klavdia Ivanovna. This photograph is the only thing that connects me to a dear past. Why do you need such a past? It will only hinder you.

Kumanin recalled how in the early years of his service in the KGB he was proud of being a second-generation Chekist and trying to get information about his missing grandfather. Maybe he was also a Chekist. But Grandfather Agathon unexpectedly announced himself in the house of a half-crazy dissident, whom Kumanin's department tried to rot in a psychiatric hospital and who, by some strange coincidence, entered his apartment with the help of a tire iron.

"Perhaps you are right," Kumanin agreed, recovering a little. The past catches up with us and sometimes hurts us. I still ask your permission to come here again with my father.

- Did Stepan also serve with you? Claudia Ivanovna asked.

"Yes," Kumanin admitted, hesitating a little.

"The parents were killed, and the children and grandchildren were forced to kill others," the old woman remarked sadly. "There's nothing to fix now after so many years.

Kumanin did not answer anything - there was nothing to answer. Neither he nor, as far as he knew, his father had killed anyone, drowned anyone in barges, or hung them from lanterns.

But I could be her son, he thought as he turned the key in the ignition. The stupefaction from the unexpected meeting with his grandfather passed, and he began to think about how to tell his father about everything. "Maybe not say anything at all? No, you have to say." Kumanin decided that when he got home, he would immediately try to contact Stepan Agafonovich on the Leningrad phone that he had found in his father's apartment.

The downpour has passed, leaving ragged clouds in the sky. The sun at times appeared in the gaps of the clouds, but already clung to the tops with its fiery disk,

trees of the blue forest in the west. For all the news that fell on him, Kumanin forgot about the pain in his eyes and dizziness. Exposing his face to the cold wind beating against the lowered window, he drove the car back to Moscow, keeping the speedometer needle at a hundred kilometers. Not a single traffic cop dared to stop the car when a KGB major was driving it in full uniform! The car was approaching the turn to Object 17. "But my grandfather's house is there," thought Kumanin. - I'd like to take a look. We must try to write a pass there.

Two "traffic cops" were standing near their car, and the third - the captain with a walkie-talkie, whom Kumanin noticed during the last trip - suddenly appeared from the roadside bushes. Stepping onto the roadway, he commanded Kumanin with a commanding wave of his baton stay.

He abruptly slowed down and, opening the door, prepared to give the traffic cop a decent rebuke if he hinted at speeding. If the captain had not stood directly in his path, Kumanin would have ignored all of his "wand" orders altogether.

The traffic cop approached the car and put his hand to the visor.

— Major Kumanin? - he asked.

"Yes," he replied in amazement. - What's the matter?

- Drive under the brick, they are waiting for you there.

- Who waits? Kumanin was outraged. — Are you crazy?

"They are waiting for it," the captain repeated, "move over." I'll take the wheel.

Pushing the completely stunned Kumanin to the side of the passenger seat, the captain got behind the wheel, turned the car around through the separation strip and drove to the forbidding "brick" along the road going to the side.

"Can you explain to me what's wrong?" Kumanin asked fiercely. "What does all this mean?" You break me...

"They will explain everything to you," the captain muttered, "sit quietly.

At this time, a barrier opened around the turn of the road, near which stood a lieutenant and two soldiers of the KGB troops with short-barreled machine guns. One of them kept a huge German Shepherd in a strict muzzle on a short leash.

The barrier rose, and the car, without stopping, drove on. Suddenly, the forest parted, as it were, and the mansion of his grandfather Agathon opened before Kumanin in all its glory. A cozy three-story house with columns and galleries, at first glance, did not suffer at all from the time. True, Kumanin was in a somewhat nervous state in order to appreciate the taste of his grandfather.

In the old days, the mansion, apparently, stood on an artificial island in the middle of an ornamental pond. Now the pond has dried up, and it seemed that the house was surrounded by dry moats, like a medieval castle. A bridge of a later construction was thrown to it, which did not at all harmonize with the architecture of the building itself.

The car crossed the bridge and stopped between the columns of the driveway, right at the massive doors where Agafon Ivanovich's chaise (or maybe a car?) once stopped.

"But he died when he was a little older than me," Kumanin thought.

The massive door opened and a man in his fifties wearing a waistcoat without a jacket and a bow tie stepped out to meet them.

"Get out," the captain ordered Kumanin. Thinking nothing, Kumanin got out of cars.

"Give up your weapons," said the man in the vest.

"I have no weapons," Kumanin replied.

— Is that how? the greeter was surprised. "Then fix your uniform and follow me."

Kumanin pulled up his tie, straightened his cap, and fastened his tunic with all the buttons. Meanwhile, the traffic cop turned around and drove Kumanin's car across the bridge in the opposite direction.

- My car! Kumanin came to his senses. — Where did he go?

"Don't ask questions," the man in the vest said sternly. - Follow me.

The first thing Kumanin saw when he entered the door was a fire shield, next to which hung a sign: "Responsible for the fire safety of the facility, comrade. ... ", but the surname was missing. They went up to the second floor. The interior was "stylized" as a common government model: plastered walls with remnants of stucco, red carpets on the floor, like at Lubyanka, a portrait of Dzerzhinsky in the hall on the second floor, some additional partitions separating the once vast premises.

"Open the briefcase," demanded the one in the vest as they walked up the hall.

Kumanin obeyed.

- What is this? the unknown asked in the same even voice, pointing to a brass plate wrapped in a handkerchief, which Kumanin seized from the missile dump of the Red Banner Air Defense Division.

"None of your business," Kumanin suddenly snapped, slamming the diplomat shut.

"Don't be rude," the man in the vest said calmly, "don't forget where you are."

"But I don't know where I am and what it all means," Kumanin continued angrily. - On what basis I was detained at the time of the operational-search ...

"That's enough," interrupted the man in the bow tie, "don't argue. I ask you, what do you have in a diplomat?"

"Personal things," Kumanin replied holding back.

"Good," the man in the vest said after a pause. - Follow me.

Stepping one after another (Kumanin behind), they walked along the carpeted path to the double doors, behind which turned out to be a vast room lined with low tables and easy chairs - something like a smoking room. Portraits of Gorbachev and Andropov hung on the wall.

Ordering Kumanin to wait with a gesture of his hand, the man in the vest went through a leather-lined door located in the back of the room. Soon he returned and with a nod of his head allowed Kumanin to enter. Letting him past him, he silently closed the door.

Kumanin found himself in an office with carefully curtained windows. The room was semi-dark, and shadows obscured its size. Behind a massive desk, lit by a desk lamp with an old-fashioned green government-issued lampshade, sat a man in a military uniform with the epaulettes of a lieutenant general. He sorted through yellowed documents in a thick folder with ribbons. For a moment Kumanin could not understand who was sitting in front of him. The lieutenant general raised his head from his papers and looked at Kumanin, and only then did he realize that General Klimov was sitting at the table.

Chapter 9

Both seemed to be equally surprised.

Apparently, Klimov had never seen Kumanin in military uniform before, since the general, closing the folder in front of him and leaning back in his chair, looked at him with amazement.

Kumanin himself, like everyone else in the Lubyanka, also never saw Klimov in uniform. In addition, he considered Klimov a major general, and was somewhat taken aback when he noticed the shoulder straps of a lieutenant general on him.

All this caused a somewhat prolonged pause, which was interrupted by Klimov:

- Good! Are you going to war?

Kumanin, for whom the pause allowed him to more or less assess the situation, decided to play for time:

"I wish you good health, Comrade General!"

- Are you roaming like a wolf along the Simferopol highway? — ignoring the greeting of the subordinate, asked Klimov. What were you supposed to do in my absence?

Kumanin drew attention to the fact that the order blocks on the uniform of General Klimov were smaller than those of Marshals Brezhnev and Zhukov, but quite enough to give the impression that the general had commanded some breakthrough shock army for two world wars in a row.

- Are you deaf? the general asked. - I think I asked, Major Kumanin, what are you doing, driving along the roads at an unacceptable speed?

"I am following your orders, Comrade General," Kumanin replied modestly.

- My order? - Klimov was artificially surprised. - Did I give you an order to create traffic accidents or lower the combat readiness of the Red Banner divisions?

"Not at all," Kumanin reported. - You gave me an order, Comrade General, to find the burial place of the last Emperor Nicholas II.

"Ah, how is that?!" Klimov perked up. - And what? Is your emperor buried on the side of the Simferopol highway, somewhere between Moscow and Serpukhov? Perhaps in the garden of this mentally deranged psychiatrist, like him?

"Pimenov," Kumanin prompted respectfully. "If you'll let me report..."

"Report," the general allowed, with all his appearance demonstrating extreme dissatisfaction with his subordinate, who was entrusted with the performance of a particularly important state task.

Kumanin opened the briefcase and placed a brass tablet wrapped in a handkerchief in front of Klimov. The tablet has been covered in patina from time to time, but the crudely carved text on it was legible without much effort. "COLONEL ROMANOV N. A. 1867-1940".

Klimov stared dumbfounded at this text, first raising his eyes to Kumanin, then lowering them again to the plate, moving his lips soundlessly. Finally, he took out a huge magnifying glass from the drawer and began to study the inscription on the tablet.

— Yes! he said, putting the magnifying glass on the table. - Interesting movie! Where did you get it?

"On the territory of General Petrunin's division," Kumanin reported. For this, he put on a uniform.

Klimov looked at Kumanin as if he saw him for the first time in his life. This is how cartoon characters look at their favorite dogs when they suddenly start talking.
human voice.

"Sit down," Klimov said after another pause and again began to examine the plate through a magnifying glass, as if suspecting that Kumanin had made it himself in order to report on the completion of the task.

- Can't there be any coincidence? - Asking himself rather than Kumanin, said Klimov.

"It's out of the question," Kumanin replied. - Everything fits.

- Excluded? Klimov asked. - Nothing can be ruled out. Before the war, such cunning people worked in the system, who only dreamed that future generations would consider them fools. Who is buried next to him?

"Some kind of hermit monks," Kumanin reported. - The last burial was at the end of 1918.

How did you get to this cemetery? the general asked.

"There are a lot of widows here in the nearby villages, whose husbands once guarded the barriers on the way to this mansion," Kumanin replied. "These widows, despite their advanced age, remember much more than you imagine. They even remember Senior Major Lisitsyn.

"Interesting," said Klimov, somewhat bewildered. - I tried to find this cemetery, but the division said that it had been destroyed a long time ago, almost immediately after the war. And how did you manage to get there?

- They took me for someone else, - Kumanin smiled, - for an environmental inspector, it seems. They poisoned a huge area with rocket fuel there. In the very center of this territory there is a cemetery, very well preserved. I will tell you even more

- on the grave of Colonel Romanov, whoever he was, I found fresh carnations. Completely amazing! A cool picture of the coming apocalypse, but here ... It is even forbidden to enter there without gas masks.

- And you were given a gas mask? Klimov asked.

They wanted to, but I refused.

"In vain," the general shook his head. - Vapors from decaying rocket fuel provoke hallucinations. You got it. Were the carnations red?

- Red - confirmed Kumanin.

"Some take it for cloves, others for poppies. It's not rocket fuel. It's much worse. If I were you, I would go to the hospital for an examination, - for some reason, smiling, said Klimov.

"They were carnations, red carnations," Kumanin insisted.

- If this is so, - Klimov drove a smile from his face, - then in general it turns out some kind of devilry. I would like to think that you only dreamed of carnations.

"It was not only carnations that I imagined, Comrade General," Kumanin answered. "I imagined a lot of things while you were away.

- For example? - General Klimov continued to look at his subordinate with unflagging interest.

Kumanin opened his briefcase again and took out a transparent folder containing the death certificate of an old woman who had come from the Siberian backwoods on an excursion to the Rostov Kremlin.

— Is that how? Klimov was surprised. "Wherever you throw it, the Romanovs are everywhere. It would be necessary in general to arrest all the Romanovs in the Union and gather them in a special camp, and appoint Major Kumanin as the commandant, so that he would force everyone to admit what they had to do with the royal family.

- All this is true, - Kumanin agreed, - but you missed one small detail. You did not pay attention to the date of death of this citizen.

"Why didn't you pay," Klimov objected. - Here it is, the date is July 28, 1988. So what?

- It was on this day, - Kumanin prompted, - that the police of the city of Rostov picked up a boy named Alyosha Lisitsyn at the bus stop.

Klimov shuddered, as if from an unexpected blow. He even huddled in his chair, although perhaps Kumanin also imagined this, like carnations on the grave of Colonel Romanov.

"Shestakova..." the general whispered. "I found out too late that you and her were in the same class, and later were lovers. I thought that you broke everything with this dissident relationship..."

Kumanin was silent. When the authorities admit their own mistakes, it is best to keep quiet and show with all your appearance that you grieve about this no less the bosses themselves.

"Of course," Klimov continued, "even this psycho from Nefedovo knows about the boy?"

"In general terms," Kumanin lied, who suddenly felt sorry for Theophilus. "Let me remind you, Comrade General, that the whole boarding school knows about this boy, where Petukhov is the director.

"Knowledge is different from knowledge," objected Klimov. It's one thing to hear, another thing to know. And it's really bad when you know too much. Or you assume that you know a lot and start writing different dissertations. There are things that no one has the right to know, not even you and me. If I had not been on a business trip, I would never have allowed you to get to Nefedovo. You understand me?

"In Nefedovo, I was looking not for the grave of the tsar, but for Nadya Shestakova," Kumanin tried to justify himself.

"I could have guessed that we had her. Besides her, no one can somehow manage this boy," Klimov muttered displeasedly. "And mind your own business." You already learned at the boarding school that we took Alyosha away. And there was nothing more to be interested in this question. You will leave for two days, and then clear up what your subordinates will do!

However, the way Klimov spoke to Sergei spoke more of the general's some confusion than of strong anger. If at first with remarks like "I wish you good health, comrade general!" while Kumanin tried to win, now, scolding Kumanin for his irresponsible improvisations, Klimov was clearly trying to buy time to collect his thoughts. And so there was another pause.

"So you say," Klimov broke the silence, "that she came to Rostov with Alyosha Lisitsyn?"

"I didn't say that," Kumanin replied quickly, "quite the contrary." I managed to find out that she left Tomsk alone.

"So," suggested the general, "they met somewhere along the road to Rostov?"

- I think, - objected Kumanin, - that everything was not quite so. She came to Rostov the Great, because she knew the exact date of Alyosha Lisitsyn's appearance there, she was convinced of this and ... - Kumanin fell silent.

"And..." Klimov repeated, "and what's next?"

"And she died, as you know," Kumanin shrugged.

- Fun things! Klimov said. - And how did she know the exact date of the boy's appearance?

"They say," Kumanin said not quite confidently, "that this date was accurately predicted in its time.

- By whom? Klimov asked.

"I would also like to understand," Kumanin admitted honestly.

- How do you think? Klimov asked. - This boy, Alyosha, has anything to do with the commandant of "Object 17" Alexander Lisitsyn?

- And to Vasily Aleksandrovich Lisitsyn, secretary of the Tomsk regional party committee, - added Kumanin, - who "supervised" Tatyana Nikolaevna in the village of Asino, Tomsk region. Everything is very strange, if you remember that the person known at the facility as Lisitsyn, in fact, had a completely different surname. Lisitsyn is operational

alias.

- How do you know that? Klimov was surprised.

- He is listed in our veteran card file among the workers to be rehabilitated. It says that "Lisitsyn" is not a real surname," Kumanin reported.

"Think about it," Klimov said angrily. What a mess in our system! What is considered top secret in one division can be found in the public domain of another. Did you learn from the "historians"?

"That's right," Kumanin confirmed, "at Nikitin's."

Was his real name listed? the general asked.

"No," Kumanin reassured, "there was only a red badge in the form of an asterisk. Nikitin explained that such badges are on pseudonyms.

— Do you read English? Klimov suddenly went over.

"Yes, a little," Kumanin replied with a somewhat guilty look. The authorities never liked the "very literate".

Klimov got up heavily from his chair and retired to a semi-dark corner of the office, where, apparently, there was a safe built into the wall, and returned with a small clerical folder with ordinary ribbons. The general pulled a yellowed piece of paper out of it and handed it to Kumanin.

- Read.

In faded ink on a piece of paper was written in English:

"My Dear Fox, I need not tell you how I feel indebted for all that you have done towards consummating my escape. I feel that you will do all you can to maintain my State Secret.

Believe me sincerely.

Nicholas, 08/14/1919."

- Got it? Klimov asked.

"No," Kumanin answered slowly, "I haven't understood anything yet." Fox. Lisitsyn is Fox?

"That's the point," said Klimov, "that it's impossible to fully understand whether this person is one or not. There were such "wise men" in the Cheka and the GPU that they confused themselves and Lenin and Stalin. In the NKVD there were already simpler guys, one might say, some bone-breakers. They shot almost all of the former ones without exception. On the one hand, this can only be welcomed. In the end, what kind of secret service, in the actions of which no one can understand at all. Take the famous Operation Trust. No one understood, including Artuzov, what they were doing? Are they filtering emigration or preparing a coup d'état in the USSR? But after Yezhov, the entire system, from the NKVD to the KGB, became horribly rectangular. Any secretary of the district committee could already calculate her actions. This is also unacceptable. Klimov sighed.

- At first, I also thought that Fox and Lisitsyn were the same person. Then I realized that it wasn't. After all, Fox escaped, and Lisitsyn was shot. There is, of course, nothing special about this fact. Lisitsyn could be included in the lists for execution only in order to give an opportunity

Fox quietly go into the shadows. The case was personally supervised by Comrade Stalin. And this was not an ordinary person. We also know absolutely nothing about him. I'm talking, of course, about the pre-war Stalin. The war shattered him, turning the genius into a martinet, something in between Hindenburg and Trotsky.

Never before had Klimov spoken to him as an equal, and Kumanin listened with his mouth slightly open.

"And this Fox," he asked, lowering his voice for some reason, "who is he?" German, Jewish?

Klimov laughed:

- You can't even imagine, Sergey, what a mixture it is. A German Jew with roots in Vitebsk, who naturalized in the United States, but nevertheless retained German citizenship. This paper, which you have just read, was obtained in America. It seems to me that the security officer who accompanied Nicholas II to Yekaterinburg had the surname Fox, and later he took refuge under the pseudonym Lisitsyn. As surprising as it may sound, Fox returned to the United States. Now he has already died, though his son is alive, who has no idea about daddy's affairs, all in some kind of business. But Lisitsyn also had children here - a son and a daughter. The son died, but the daughter is alive, lives in Riga. The grandson of that Lisitsyn, Alexei Lisitsyn, volunteered to fight in Afghanistan and went missing there. In other words, whether it was one person who produced Foxes in the States, and Lisitsyns in Russia, or they were two swindlers, they, apparently, have nothing to do with our boy.

Klimov was silent and continued:

- The Americans have long declassified all the documents related to the activities of Fox. They claim that his ancestors settled in the Far West in the middle of the last century. If someone is lucky enough to survive several global catastrophes, then covering their tracks is not at all difficult. But it is almost impossible to walk back along these tracks in order to try to imagine a real picture of what was happening then. No matter how you specify the details, it will always be nothing more than another version with some degree of plausibility. Do you understand me, Kumanin?

"Yes, of course," Kumanin hastily agreed, he wanted to hear what was going on.

"Imagine," the general reasoned, "that you managed to catch that old woman from Siberia alive. Suppose she confirmed that she is the second, if I am not mistaken, the daughter of the king. What's next? I would have to record these words, as they say, "from the words of the victim." No evidence to be found. Those who want to believe in it will believe, those who do not want to, will not believe it. This is what the whole history of mankind is based on. Looking back at the past, everyone sees in it what they want.

"But there are documents," Kumanin objected timidly, "which are usually considered irrefutable..."

- Documentation? Klimov laughed. It's like you don't know how they're made. Try using the surviving documents to recreate in fifty years at least the atmosphere of that happiness, equality and brotherhood of peoples that reigned in our country for these seventy years. I'll see what happens. However, it will not be possible to see it, except from the next world.

Kumanin has already begun to be frightened by such frankness of General Klimov. He remembered the rumors circulating around the Lubyanka, how employees seconded to the general were disappearing somewhere. Now they are at one of the "secret points", it would never occur to anyone to look for Kumanin here - he did not have access here, and therefore simply could not be here. Sergei imagined how the investigator would work on the fact of the "disappearance of a senior

detective Major Kumanin. He will have to repeat all the way from home along the Simferopol highway, including the military unit, visit the house of Theophilus and Claudia Ivanovna, arrest them on suspicion of murder. Maybe that's how it was intended?

- What happened to you? Klimov noticed his condition. - Are you tired? Do you want cognac?

"Thank you," Kumanin muttered. - I probably really swallowed something in the cemetery, I'm shivering, Comrade General ...

"Especially," Klimov remarked, "you need to take a sip - it will feel better."

The general took out a pot-bellied bottle with a black-and-gold label from somewhere and poured it into two small glasses of brown liquid.

- Let's live! he said, and drank without clinking glasses. Kumanin drank silently.

Soon I felt better, and the fear that suddenly crawled out of the depths of my soul crawled back into its dark abyss.

"So," Kumanin dared to ask, "Fox and Lisitsyn, or just Fox-Lisitsyn, took the tsar out of Yekaterinburg on the very night that went down in history as the night of the murder of the royal family?"

- Are you asking me? Klimov was surprised. You were in charge of the investigation. I would like to hear your report, not my own reasoning.

"My report is almost written," Kumanin reported. "As you ordered, I will present it to you on Monday morning."

MAJOR KUMANIN'S REPORT CONTINUED

"On the evening of July 16, 1918, a detachment arrived in Yekaterinburg from Moscow, led by a former captain of the German army, whose name could not be established. However, the detachment was subordinate to the Special Commissioner of the Extraordinary Commission, Alexander Lisitsyn, who was sent to Yekaterinburg along with the German detachment. At the request of the German side, the tsar was to be taken to Moscow for a meeting with representatives of the German government in order to officially confirm the articles of the Brest Treaty. Everything else seems to me an improvisation (though not very successful) by Yurovsky, Goloshchekin, Beloborodov, on the one hand, and Lisitsyn with a German captain, on the other hand. The purpose of this "improvisation" was to announce the execution of the tsar, his family and retinue after their departure from Yekaterinburg with the Lisitsyn detachment. The tsar was supposed to learn about this action from the newspapers and, according to the Germans, become more pliable in the negotiations. In case of disagreement, the Germans threatened to hand over the Russian Tsar back to the Soviet government, which had already announced his execution. The Soviet government itself was placed politically, economically and militarily in such a position that it could in no way influence such behavior of the Germans.

"On Monday I won't be at the Lubyanka," Klimov continued, "you will give the report to Sveta. Just so that there is not a single word there about the fact that you discovered the grave. Not a sound. Understood?"

"Aren't we going to do an exhumation?" Kumanin asked, obviously cheered up after the order on Monday morning to hand over a report to the ensign Svetlana - today they will not kill.

— Exhumation? Klimov asked. - We will not. And in general, no one is talking about it. For finding the grave, I praise: well done! To be honest, I knew a lot from what you told me

I reported today, but I did not suspect where the grave was. He assumed that it was somewhere nearby, but he could not figure out the exact place, and he could not even think about this copper plate. Live for a century - be amazed! Now let's think: could they hang this sign without the personal permission of Comrade Stalin? Maybe they could. In December 1940, Stalin was no longer up to it; after the war, none of the servants were left alive. And behind the new cases, this story was simply forgotten. That microfilm you played in my waiting room is all I could find. Perhaps there is something else, but I did not get to the bottom - There are a lot of other things. So, well done, Major Kumanin.

"But you said," Kumanin said, blushing at the praise from his superiors, "that this matter is under the control of the General Secretary himself. He gave the order to discover the remains of Nicholas II. Now I, that is, we found them. Why don't you want to finish the job - exhume the remains, conduct a full scientific and forensic examination and openly announce everything?"

Kumanin saw an insinuating smile play on the general's lips.

"General secretaries come and go," he said. "One astrologer who was spanked in 1937 predicted there would be seven. This is the seventh, that is, the last. The last General Secretary orders to find the remains of the last king. Very interesting, right? And the penultimate General Secretary, Konstantin Ustinovich Chernenko, predicted that on the way to communism we would have a long period of developed socialism. He made a mistake, as, I remember, all his predecessors made mistakes in global forecasts. Lenin predicted the inevitability of world revolution and the collapse of capitalism. The period of developed socialism is ending, or rather, it has already ended, but not because communism has come, but because the road along which this same socialism marched has come to a dead end. Gorbachev knows this better than anyone, and in the near future he will have something to do, except to speed up the operation to search for the remains of Nicholas II.

MAJOR KUMANIN'S REPORT CONTINUED

"Apparently, Nicholas II had the courage not to succumb to pressure from the Germans. He firmly refused to recognize the treaty and was eventually handed over to the Soviet leadership. For some reason, the leadership wished to save the life of the king and his family.

There are several very obvious reasons for this:

1. They wanted to keep the royal family as hostages in case of a disaster in the civil war after the collapse of Germany.
2. They thought to use it when searching for the so-called royal jewels.
3. They wanted to penetrate with the help of the former king into the system of foreign banks controlled by the crowned persons.

You can find many other reasons why it was much more profitable to keep the king alive than to kill him.

It was not possible to find out the details, but somewhere no later than 1921, the tsar and, apparently, some part of his family were placed in a mansion requisitioned by the revolution, which received the name "Object 17". There they were kept for a long time under the protection of the same Chekist Lisitsyn until the natural death of the tsar in December 1940. Nicholas II was buried in an abandoned cemetery near the liquidated monastic skete, as evidenced by a tombstone found during a survey of the area. The surviving members of the royal family, under the guise of administrative deportees, were sent to remote and sparsely populated areas with a non-disclosure agreement.

THE USSR".

Kumanin was silent.

"Seriously speaking," the general continued the monologue, making it clear that everything said before was a joke, "I don't want to exhume the grave, and here's why. THIS MAN DESERVES PEACE. Let him lie where he was buried. Can you imagine what will happen in all levels of our party and state hierarchy if we now hand over these remains to them? Endless examinations will begin, where the results of one will refute the conclusions of the other. Foreign experts will join the case, half of the remains will disappear ... They will be plundered for souvenirs, sold for foreign currency to countless admirers in the West, used up in countless investigative experiments, and the like. Knowing our rules," Klimov chuckled, "I can well assume that they will simply be exchanged for a container with video equipment or clothes, and they will be placed in the shrine of some Orthodox church in Brussels or somewhere else, they have it there. And Nicholas II, no matter how you treat him, was first of all very Russian. He went to the Russian land, and there is nothing to pull out his ashes into the light of God. In addition, do not forget that he is canonized, and I personally would not want to get involved with the relics of the saint. And you, Kumanin?"

To be honest, Kumanin most of all did not want to argue with Klimov, nevertheless, he cautiously asked:

- But as far as I understand, Comrade General, it was about his reburial either in the Peter and Paul Fortress in Leningrad, or in the St. Sergius Lavra of Zagorsk. Is it bad, is it better to lie in rocket fuel?

"In any case," Klimov replied, "it's too early to talk about it. There is an American proverb: 'never say never'. No one is ready for the solemn reburial of the imperial remains in our country now, and everyone is ripe to plunder the bones for souvenirs. Perhaps the fate of Nikolai decreed that the rocket fuel dissolve all his bones in the ground and no one would ever bother him again. He deserved it. He does not need the repentance of those who, in the wake of the new political situation, are trying to play with marked cards, putting his bones on the line. And he does not need pity, because even during his lifetime he managed to take revenge on everyone, making the idea of building socialism completely unpromising, especially in one single country.

Kumanin's head went round. He would not be surprised if General Klimov, after the report, ordered to shoot him and immediately burn him in some nearby crematorium. But what he will have to listen to from Klimov, one of the highest dignitaries of the KGB, speeches falling under several articles of the Criminal Code at once: the seventieth - anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation and the sixty-fourth, p. government, he could not imagine. And therefore, listening to the general and afraid to miss even a word, Sergei could not get rid of the feeling of some kind of unreality, as if everything was not happening to him, but he was only watching from the side, like on a television screen or in a movie. At one point, when he felt especially uncomfortable, he even caught himself thinking: "Maybe turn everything off and go to sleep?". And he was terribly frightened, realizing that it was impossible to turn it off.

"He took revenge on everyone," Klimov said ominously, "to all of us, if you prefer that way." He took revenge and went down to the grave with dignity.

— Are you feeling bad? Klimov suddenly interrupted his revelations. - Not ashamed? So young, but completely limp.

"Comrade General," pleaded Kumanin, "it's hard for me to digest everything.

"I understand," Klimov nodded his head. — Previously, you only read such things in samizdat literature or in indictments. And you do not remember what I say, but take note, because all this may soon come in handy.

"All right," Kumanin agreed with an effort, "but how could the tsar take revenge on everyone if he was kept in the strictest isolation right here, where we are talking now."

- Yes. It seems so, - confirmed Klimov. Although this cannot be said with 100% certainty. I told you that in those years they knew how to mislead. Even the grave that you, Kumanin, found is not one hundred percent. It is this copper plate that greatly devalues it. The logic of counterintelligence is not the logic of Aristotle. It's all based on an old Jewish joke: "You say you're going to Odessa to make me think you're not going to Odessa, but you really are going to Odessa, so why are you lying to me?" In any case, there are no traces of the fact that an important person was kept here. There were hints, rumors about some kind of defense institute, which was disbanded after the death of the chief designer, Colonel Romanov, Nikodim Averyanovich. I checked: indeed there was one. Born in 1867, he was a colonel in the tsarist army, worked during the First World War on the creation of Russian military gases. The revolution found him in Yaroslavl. Lost on the 25th. There was no family. And something remained in the basement: the remains of an exhaust hood and the like, indicating that there was some kind of laboratory here. Of course, all this could have had another purpose, but go figure it out. They say that then a catastrophe happened here, either the bacillus escaped from the test tube, or there was a leak of some substance. The colonel had to be urgently buried in a remote place. The rest themselves died or were shot out of humanism. During the war years, a cipher school existed here until 1945. Then they re-planned it in a new way, made classes, a common dining room, living quarters and so on. Then Abakumov chose this mansion for his business, I think, just for relaxation. He liked to fish in silence. I knew that life would not be long. Klimov sighed.

- Why am I telling you all this, - the general continued, - so that you understand - we can't prove anything by and large. I personally believe that Nikolai was kept here, but it is as easy to refute me as it is for me to refute those who will refute me. Therein lies the great universality of history. Who is, for example, Emelyan Pugachev? Was he a Don Cossack who fought for the will of the people, or a Polish confederate colonel who stirred up Russia? Lots of evidence for both. Read the protocols of his interrogation - an illiterate peasant, take his camping library - there is not a single book in Russian, only in French, Latin and Polish. So think what you want. So here.

- The fact remains only that Nicholas II was taken out of Yekaterinburg. Yurovsky spoke about this before his death, he did not want to die with the stigma of an executioner. Although now I don't know if it's better or worse. When the Germans realized that nothing could be achieved from the tsar in the sense of confirming the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, they handed him over to ours. It was the 19th year. Lenin and his company already considered that their days were numbered. Do you remember, in one of the works of Vladimir Ilyich: "do this and that in case we fly off."

"Comrade General..." Kumanin put in plaintively.

"Listen," Klimov interrupted. - Frightening with execution - after all, they had already announced their execution - they demanded that Nikolai name the places where treasures are hidden, which are usually called "royal", although this is not entirely true. The treasures belonged to Russia, and the tsar did not at all want to give them into the hands of those whom he considered highway robbers. Then they began to blackmail him. Do you remember, at the beginning there was a message that only the tsar was shot, and the family was evacuated to a safe place. Then they unexpectedly admitted that the family had also been shot. This is for him - "prick, otherwise we will slap the family." But Nicholas was courageous

man, only repeated: "All the will of God." And he was smart enough to understand that they would not do anything to him until he gave them "tsatski" to them. Starting from the 17th year, everything from gold and diamonds just went crazy. Then they wrote that the queen and princesses had diamonds sewn into their clothes and underwear, which became the property of the republic? These clothes - handkerchiefs, katsaveiki - were later sent to Moscow. Lisitsyn and Fox, when the royal family was taken out of Yekaterinburg, naturally changed their clothes in order to smuggle everyone by rail without too much noise. I saw these clothes - they are still intact in one store, however, without any annotation, bullet holes or traces of blood.

In short, nothing worked until Fox got down to business. It is difficult to say where he was at the beginning, since until 1921 his presence is not felt, but from the 21st year Fox's hand is felt very clearly. He asked the royal family: "Give them everything they want. Jewels will do them no good, rather bring their death closer. Values should not lie dead weight, they should work for the good of Russia, but Russia perished, sacrificing itself in fact to save civilization. Give these scoundrels everything they extort from you. Jewels, especially stones, do not stay with the unclean, they kill the owners with dirty hands and dirty souls and break free.

"He really said that," Kumanin asked, "or are you suggesting that?"

"Don't interfere," Klimov cut him off rudely. "Not everything is supposed to be known. Maybe someday you will have to interrogate me too, but that time has not yet come. If you carefully studied Lisitsyn's correspondence with the Lubyanka, then you probably noticed that a terrible fuss suddenly began about the package that disappeared when the tsar was taken out. Lisitsyn blamed Yurovsky, Yurovsky blamed Lisitsyn, all together on Sverdlov, and so on?"

With a nod of his head, Kumanin indicated that he remembered what he was talking about.

"In the letter," Klimov continued, "which Nicholas II allegedly wrote to Fox," Klimov again pointed to the note in English that Kumanin had in his hands, "it is about a state secret that must be kept. The letter is dated 1919.

"Yes, yes," Kumanin answered hurriedly, "I drew attention to this, Comrade General, and I wanted to clarify with you, but after your story, I just have this state secret
flew out of my head.

"In vain," Klimov raised his index finger instructively, "for this is the whole point. I'm sure that our smart guys were looking for this package, believing that it was in it that the largest of the royal diamonds were hidden. Above diamonds, their imagination did not work, they were so sure of the infallibility of the only correct decision.

In reality, the package contained something more valuable than all the diamonds in the world. The tsar gave this package to Fox, who forwarded it to Washington. This was the biggest defeat that our country suffered in the entire history of its existence.

- What could be there? Kumanin asked in amazement. - I realized that there were papers, apparently financial ones. What was really in there? I don't understand anything anymore, Comrade General.

"I'll try to explain," said Klimov, "although I'm not sure that you will understand everything, if only because I myself do not fully understand everything. The main thing is the following - all the social formations that humanity has passed through inevitably ended up in a dead end. The exit from it and the transition to a new social formation was usually accompanied by long and bloody cataclysms, throwing back the progress achieved far back. The faster this or that social system developed, the faster it

found himself in a crisis, the way out of which was theoretically seen in wars and revolutions. Capitalism, rapidly developing in the world, had exhausted its possibilities by the beginning of the 20th century. Therefore, it was not necessary to be seven spans in the forehead in order to predict global wars and bloody revolutions already at the beginning of the century, as, for example, Vladimir Ilyich did.

Russia, as is known, entered the path of capitalist development later than other countries. In fact, she did this when all the industrial powers came close to the final phase of development and, in search of a way out of the situation, piled up tons of weapons to break through this impasse. Russia, on the other hand, was still quite far from this and therefore could more or less soberly assess the situation. In the era of Nicholas II, Russian scientific thought reached unprecedented heights, significantly ahead of its time. There are enough examples for that, and I hope you know them as well as I do, remember Stolypin, Putilov. So, somewhere from 1907 to 1909, Russian financiers and economists, the same Tereshchenko, Leontiev, developed a plan for the development of the country for the period after 1925. It was believed that with the existing pace of industrial development and the rapidly growing scientific potential, Russia, precisely by 1925 (plus or minus a few years), would catch up with the leading industrial countries of the West in terms of the main parameters, i.e. will come close to the same problems as they did at the beginning of the century. And so Russian scientists have developed their own way around this impasse. Everything was taken into account - even the huge future revenues from the sale of oil and natural gas, although the latter had not yet been extracted. A scientifically based distribution of these incomes among all subjects of the empire was supposed, which could raise the standard of living by several orders of magnitude and bring the country to the world leaders.

"These documents," Klimov continued, "were submitted to the tsar for consideration and approval. Nicholas II, together with such authorities in this matter as Bunge, Witte and others, appreciated this plan, although he believed that it would be possible to implement it no earlier than by the middle of the 30s. No wonder Stolypin dreamed: "Give us only 20 years of peaceful life!" Of course, implementation was impossible without powerful institutions of democracy, which is why Nikolai doubted that this could be achieved before the 1930s. He was just beginning to experiment with the Duma and political freedoms and already had cause for disappointment. But, as I have already said, he appreciated these developments and even took them with him into exile, hoping to acquaint the leaders of the country with this plan when it leaves the political madness. However, already in Yekaterinburg, he realized that he was unlikely to be able to live up to that time, and then he handed over the package to Fox-Lisitsyn. Before that, as the arrest regime tightened, he was very afraid of losing this package. Several times I passed it on to authorized persons and then ordered to return it back. Everything happened when he was read a message about his own "execution" and warned that the sentence would be carried out as soon as the authorities deemed it necessary. Fox forwarded this package to the US. How, I do not know. And does it matter now? Well, you know the results.

What results are you talking about, Comrade General? Kumanin asked.
known...

Klimov glanced at his watch.

"We don't have much time," he said, "you and I have been chatting. What are the results, you ask? The results are obvious to everyone. The Americans also saw the dead end I was talking about, but they hoped that the fire of the First World War would destroy it, and they themselves would skip the war on a tangent. In the late 1920s, they miraculously survived. That's what we had joy - Lenin's predictions come true! Maybe it would have happened if the Plan of Nicholas II had not fallen into the hands of the Americans around that time. Let's call him so conditionally, since he was then the head of state, where this plan was developed. To tell the truth, I'm not completely sure that it could be carried out in Russia. He came to America like a grain in black soil. With his help, Americans managed to rush into the future. Lenin really heard

the death rattle of capitalism, but did not know that a medicine had already been created that would ensure immortality for capitalism. This medicine was the "Plan of Nicholas II." And we rushed along the socialist rails, and already from the end of the 70s our dead end was clearly visible to the leadership, but this time no one offered a way out of it. There was only one way out - to slow down, so as not to die under the rubble of an inevitable catastrophe. But the blow will still be strong, it was painful for us to disperse.

"Comrade General," Kumanin took advantage of the pause, "did you see this plan of Nicholas II?" Have you read?

"Fragments translated from English," Klimov answered. - Where they keep the original is still unknown.

Klimov suppressed a sigh and said:

- OK. Now listen to me carefully. Operation completed. For its exemplary performance, by order of the chairman of the KGB, General of the Army Kryuchkov, you, Major Kumanin, are awarded the military rank of lieutenant colonel.

Kumanin was stunned by surprise.

"I serve the Soviet Union," he mumbled, standing up.

"Serve," Klimov approved, "especially since there is very little time left. Because by the same order, Lieutenant Colonel Kumanin is put into reserve, i.e. dismissed from the authorities without the right to wear a uniform, but with the preservation of a certificate and some other benefits, which the personnel department will inform you about.

Kumanin wanted to say something, but Klimov cut him off.

"Don't ask questions," the general ordered, "you will find out about everything in due time." My advice is take a vacation now. Take a walk, then you will issue a transfer to the reserve. They will find you later and tell you what to do. Now return to Moscow. All.

Accompanied by the general, Kumanin walked through the deserted corridors of the mansion to the entrance to the entrance gallery. His car, washed and refueled, stood at the entrance, in it sat the same captain - "traffic cop".

"Comrade General," Kumanin broke the silence, "since I have already been dismissed from the organs, may I ask a question?"

- Ask, - allowed Klimov, - only not very difficult.

Why are you in military uniform today? Kumanin asked.

The general laughed.

"I knew that you were dressed up in uniform and decided to do the same so that you would not be arrogant.

Then he leaned close to Kumanin's ear and added quietly:

- The boy got me. "General," he says, "I want you to come in uniform if you are really a general. I want that." Well, what are you going to do? I had to change clothes, - and, noticing Sergey's frozen look, he asked, - can you hear me?

Klimov opened the car door and turned to the captain sitting behind the wheel:

- Take the major to Moscow, where he says. The days are free. - turning to

To Sergei, Klimov added, pointing to the aerial colonnade of the gallery:

- What a beauty, Kumanin. After all, your grandfather had good taste.

And went back to the massive doors.

Epilogue

Everything that followed Kumanin recalls somehow uncertainly, as if everything happened not to him, but to someone else, and this, the other, could not tell him anything connected, and Kumanin himself, naturally, could not accurately retell what he heard.

The captain, dressed in the uniform of a state traffic inspector, drove him home. Kumanin felt very bad: shivering, nauseous, dizzy. The refrigerator, as usual, was almost empty, no medicines. A bottle of vodka was found, bought on the occasion of the failed birthday of Stepan Agafonovich.

Sergei took a hot shower, drank half a glass of vodka and, before going to bed, decided to phone his father in Leningrad.

It was about nine o'clock in the evening. Kumanin dialed the Leningrad code and phone number 355-99-93. The beeps were long, but no one came up for a long time. Finally, at the other end of the wire, the receiver was picked up, and a muffled voice answered:

- Security post. Junior Sergeant Kapustin.

"Excuse me," Kumanin said. - Could you invite Stepan Agafonovich Kumanin, a retired lieutenant colonel, to the phone. He seems to be resting.

Kumanin was sure that his father was resting in some closed departmental sanatorium. And the fact that a "junior sergeant" was on duty convinced him even more of this. However, his kind question elicited an incomprehensible chuckle from junior sergeant Kapustin, in which there was an admixture of confusion.

"We have a lot of vacationers," the guard answered with an intonation incomprehensible to Kumanin. Where are you actually calling?

- Is this a holiday home? Kumanin asked.

- Yes, - junior sergeant Kapustin laughed, - of course, a rest home, the best in the world.

"So," Kumanin continued to insist, "look, please, Kumanin Stepan Agafo should rest with you ...

"How long has he been chilling here?" the guard asked.

"Two weeks already," Kumanin prompted.

This put the junior sergeant in an even more cheerful mood.

"You know," he said, "we are just guards. You should call tomorrow afternoon, at eleven o'clock, when someone from the administration will be there. You have to look at the registration books. I just want to warn you that no one will give you such information on the phone.

will give. You have to come yourself. True, you say that he has only been with us for two weeks, then maybe they will find him. But they won't say anything on the phone, and don't dream.

Thanking him, Kumanin hung up. Of course, in a departmental rest home they will not disclose the names of their guests over the phone, who knows who. They probably won't let you in. I could guess myself.

But Sergei wanted to quickly inform his father that he had found his grandfather, and even under such dramatic circumstances. And he decided to go to Leningrad.

At night he had chills, there were urges to vomit. It seemed to ease up in the morning. But, leaving the house, Kumanin felt so dizzy that he did not even dare to get behind the wheel and went to Lubyanka by trolley bus.

The hustle and bustle of public transport had a beneficial effect on his condition. When he got to the controls, he felt relatively tolerable. Having signed the order on conferring the next military rank and withdrawing to the reserve from September 1 of this year, Kumanin issued a vacation for a month, and then looked into the medical unit.

- It's hard to say, - the doctor said with the usual deep thinking, - it would be nice to be examined, young man. There is no temperature, the heart is normal. Overtired, most likely. Perhaps the allergy developed on a nervous basis. Relax in the wilderness, go fishing. Try not to drink alcohol. Do you smoke? No? And don't smoke. There will be complaints - contact us. We'll take him to the hospital for an examination.

Late in the evening of the same day, Kumanin "Red Arrow" left for Leningrad. He seemed to feel better, but still lousy.

In the morning, having arrived in Leningrad and went out to the square in front of the Moscow railway station, Kumanin got into a taxi and gave the driver the address:

- Kamskaya, 24.

- To Smolenskoye, or what? the driver asked.

Kumanin did not understand, but nodded. I didn't want to talk. They passed Nevsky Prospekt, jumped over bridges from where Kumanin could admire the architectural beauties of the cradle of three revolutions, turned onto the embankment, then somewhere else, and soon the Volga stopped on a nondescript street. To the right, a bank overgrown with grass descended to a small river and the ruins of a church rose, which did not lose its airy beauty even in this form. Directly there was a wall with an arched gate, at which a policeman loomed.

"We've arrived," the driver said, "here it is." And he pointed towards the archway.

— What is it? Kumanin did not understand.

- Cemetery, - answered the driver, - as you said, Smolenskoye, Kamskaya, 24.

- You are not mistaken? Kumanin asked, feeling the chills begin to beat him again.

— What could be a mistake, — the taxi driver was surprised. - I asked you.

Kumanin was perplexedly silent.

"Commander," the driver asked impatiently, "where are we going now?" Or will we stay here?

Having silently paid, Kumanin got out of the car. He looked around and went to the policeman standing at the arch of the cemetery gates.

Is there a sanatorium or rest home nearby? Kumanin asked the sentry.

He shrugged in bewilderment.

- I don't know, I guess not. Holiday houses further across the Neva, on the islands.

- And this, - Kumanin gestured towards the cemetery, - Kamskaya street, house 24?

"Exactly," the policeman confirmed.

Sergei walked under the arch, drawing attention to the memorial plaque, which said that Pushkin's nanny, Arina Rodionovna, was buried in the cemetery. But the exact location of her grave is unknown.

To the right, in front of Kumanin, an old cemetery church opened, five-domed, with a bell tower, to the left of it stood a small chapel, still taken up by restoration scaffolding. People came out of the doors of the church. The old women in headscarves, turning around, quickly crossed themselves to the church or chapel and spread out about their business. Ahead, the cemetery itself turned green with trees and bushes, the age of which, apparently, was very respectable, if they managed to bury and lose Arina Rodionovna on it.

Kumanin did not know what to do next. It remained to check the phone number he called from Moscow. This turned out to be easy, since the number was listed on a billboard at the entrance to the cemetery. There was no doubt - he was talking with the policeman on duty from the security of the cemetery, which is why the conversation turned out to be so strange.

Kumanin sat down on a bench near the entrance, almost opposite the church, trying to decide what to do next, who to turn to now, where to go? Maybe return to Moscow and once again, properly, inspect the father's apartment in order to find some additional facts by which it was possible to find out exactly where he had gone. Should I call my brother to come to Moscow and start looking for my father together?

Meanwhile, the service in the church ended, and the people gradually dispersed. The policeman, looming at the gate, also disappeared. The sun was hiding in the clouds, then jumping out of them. The centuries-old trees rustled their leaves in fright when, once again, a rather cold wind blew from the side of the bay.

Kumanin started up, looked around - no one was there. Apparently, he dozed off, sitting on the bench. There was graveyard silence, broken only by the noise of tree crowns overhead. Sergei glanced at his watch—it was still. He wanted to wind them up and once again looked around in the hope of seeing a street clock somewhere so that he could check the time. Of course, he did not see a clock anywhere, but he did notice a man walking with an energetic gait along the central alley of the cemetery. Having come up with the church, the unknown person began to turn his head around, as if looking for someone, seeing Kumanin sitting on a bench, resolutely went straight to him.

As he approached, Kumanin managed to get a good look at the man. He was of indeterminate age, with tousled hair long in need of a haircut, an untidy beard, or rather stubble, sticking out in all directions, like a hedgehog fish. The unknown person was wearing a wrinkled gray jacket, worn either over a T-shirt or a blue T-shirt. This composition was completed by "black glasses, but not the same as ours and Western dandies wear, but rather reminiscent of goggles of electric welders with an elastic band around

occiput.

The man could well turn out to be a homeless person or, say, a local gas welder, putting in order the fences on the graves. Kumanin was sure that he would now be asked to either light a cigarette or a ruble. Sergey did not smoke, and therefore he already felt a triplet in his pocket to give it away without getting involved in any discussions. The stranger walked up to the bench and said happily:

- Sergey Stepanovich, forgive me generously for being late. Khalturka, you know, in the morning the cellar, it was necessary to finish. I was afraid that you would not wait for me.

Kumanin was stunned silent.

"You understand," the stranger continued, "there is a lot of work: someone to put up a fence, someone to weld, and someone to repair the car. They do not disdain, you know, to drive cars directly to the cemetery. I can't look at the sun without goggles..."

"Listen," Kumanin came to his senses, cautiously moving away from the welder who sat down next to him on the bench. - We don't know each other. What do you want from me?

"Well, of course," the welder said, "I have a hole in my head!" I didn't introduce myself.

Kumanin drew attention to the fact that the unknown person's jacket and trousers were burned in several places, and he himself smelled of burning and propane, like from a shipyard.

"My name is," continued the welder, "Israel Lazarevich. Ariman Israel Lazarevich. I work in the funeral services department at this cemetery. I cultivate, so to speak, the last path of citizens. And he held out his dirty hand to Kumanin.

Sergei recoiled. The thought flashed through my head that this man did not look like a Jew at all. But, apparently, this is the same person to whom Stepan Agafonovich went.

Kumanin wanted to know about his father, but instead for some reason he asked:

How did you know about my arrival?

"But you yourself warned me by phone," Israel Lazarevich was sincerely surprised. — Didn't you call yesterday at 355-99-93? I thought it was you.

"So what are you," Kumanin was surprised in his turn, "do you live right here?" In the service area?

The Jewish welder was quite amused:

- As you said? In the service area? Well, where do you order me to live when there is so much work? Of course, I live here. As you wittily remarked, in the service area. After all, you, too, Sergei Stepanovich, live in the service. Is your house, as far as I know, departmental? And I have a departmental one. And our departments, one might say, are kindred. Only we are a higher authority. We are all supposed to live in the service area. This, if you like, is our privilege.

"Some kind of nonsense," thought Kumanin, again feeling severe dizziness and nausea. Overcoming the surging weakness, he asked:

— Where is my father? The welder laughed.

Are you worried about your father? Everything is fine with your dad. You should be worried about yourself.

— What does it all mean? Kumanin lost his patience. - Are you threatening me? Where is my father, I ask?

He decided that it would be a good idea to deal with this Jew, to establish his identity. Who is he even that allows such jokes with a KGB officer. Kumanin looked around for a policeman, but he was not nearby.

"You look bad, Sergei Stepanovich," Israel Lazarevich said sympathetically. - You should take care of your health, and not walk around the cemeteries and stir up other people's graves, tear off the signs from them for souvenirs. All this is bad. The sin is big.

- And how, I wonder, did you know this? Kumanin asked ominously, finally coming to his senses.

Israel Lazarevich sighed sadly and wearily.

"Why are you so nervous, Sergei Stepanovich," he said. - Don't take care of yourself. I even told your deceased father about this: "I say, your son will burn in the service for not smelling tobacco, because he takes everything too close to his heart. Work loves fools ... "

Kumanin wilted again. He did not even understand that Israel Lazarevich called Stepan Agafonovich "deceased." He heard the word, but somehow did not attach any importance to everything.

"Listen," he said wearily, "I don't understand what you are talking about and what you want from me. Tell me where is my father? I need him. I have to inform him urgently... Actually, that's what I came here for.

"Yes, he knows about everything," the welder waved his dirty hand, "he knows for a long time, but he didn't tell anyone about it so as not to ruin your life and career. And myself, of course. He was sinful, but remorse struck him down.

"I'll... I'll kick your ass in the face for such words," Kumanin began, feeling, however, that he could not move his arm or leg. "What are you talking about my father!"

Israel Lazarevich giggled, covering his mouth with his grubby palm:

- You, it turns out, not only about your grandfather, but also about your father did not know anything. So I will tell you...

"I don't want to hear anything," shouted Kumanin. Tell me, where is my father? Speak, otherwise I will arrest you now ...

With an incredible effort of will, he raised his right hand and with a quick movement tore the black glasses off the welder's head.

The terrible face of Izrail Lazarevich, with empty eye sockets, as it seemed to Sergey, made Kumanin recoil in horror.

"Don't fool around," the welder said, "give me the glasses." They are government officials. I need to work.

"Give him, Seryozha, his glasses," a voice suddenly came from behind Kumanin, "without glasses, it hurts him a lot. I know, because during the interrogation in the 51st ...

Kumanin turned sharply and in the distance saw his father in a black monastic robe with a large cross on his chest.

"Give me back the glasses," my father repeated softly.

Kumanin doesn't remember anything else. ...

He was found lying in a deep unconsciousness on a bench, not far from the entrance to the cemetery, as usual they took him for a drunk and called the police. Outfit, without hesitation, took Kumanin to the nearest sobering-up station. Luckily, while doing a pocket search, they found an identity card for a KGB major and informed the Big House. The guys quickly arrived from there, they figured out that Kumanin was not drunk, but having figured it out, they sent him to the hospital.

Only on the third day Sergey came to his senses. An employee from the Big House came to him and asked if there had been an attack on Kumanin. Sergei Stepanovich told what he remembered about a Jewish welder from the Smolensk cemetery. He was transferred to the psycho-neurological department, then to the infectious disease department, as a result, he lay in the hospital for more than six months.

All this time, doctors desperately tried to make a diagnosis. They suspected acute poisoning with gasoline vapors or other highly toxic substances, and nervous exhaustion, and microstroke and amnesia. Sergei himself believes that what happened to him is not at all the result of being at the grave of Colonel Romanov, although there is nothing to explain
can't really.

Coming out of the hospital, Kumanin was commissioned, i.e. dismissed from the KGB for health reasons. ...

While Sergei Stepanovich was in the hospital, a lot has changed in the world - something happened that General Klimov warned about. The huge communist empire crashed into the dead end prepared for it by History. From a terrible blow, the Berlin Wall was the first to collapse, the entire Warsaw Pact collapsed behind it, and, finally, before the eyes of the whole astonished world, the Soviet Union began to fall apart ...

I managed to find Major Kumanin by chance, or rather, I didn't even find him, but he found me. At the beginning of 1992, my translation of the book by the American writer John Keel "Operation Trojan Horse" was published, where in a fairly popular form the author tried to generalize all the "devilry" that is happening on Earth, from the birth of our civilization to the present day. Kille argued that all the miracles on Earth are the result of the actions of a powerful civilization that is not in space, but together with us on our small planet called Earth, in a parallel world.

Kumanin wanted to meet with me and invited me to Moscow. In his apartment, I drew attention to the photograph of Nicholas II, standing in a frame on the owner's table, but did not attach much importance to this. Firstly, I knew that Kumanin was involved in the monarchist movement, and secondly, there was already a time when the portrait of the last Russian tsar became a familiar piece of furniture in many houses of shocked Russia.

Then I listened to the story of the former KGB officer Major Kumanin. It turned out to be very difficult to talk to him - he still had a strong habit of asking questions, not answering them. He changed some of the names and geography of his adventures.

Combining what I know with what Sergey Kumanin told me, I wrote this book.

"The less you know, the longer you live," he sometimes covered himself with a "Chekist" joke.

"Well, and General Klimov," I ask, "is this a real person or not?"

"General Klimov probably already forgot his real name himself, if he ever knew it at all," Sergey said laughing. - Now he is a colonel general, he continued and

pointed to the ceiling. Now I understand what he has been doing all this time. He saw that "our locomotive" was flying forward, and tried to disengage the carriages of the train on the move, so that, if not to prevent the catastrophe itself, then at least reduce its consequences. I don't understand one thing - why the hell did they need a king? I wouldn't be surprised if Klimov's direct heirs are hidden somewhere for the time being. I won't object. We, the Kumanins, belong to an old merchant family. A whole village is named after us. I will soon sue the mansion, - and

laughed again.

In the kitchen where we talked, there is an icon hanging, not in the red corner, but still impressive.

I asked Kumanin how he felt about the latest finds of the remains of the royal family, about the ongoing speculations of Ryabov and about the activities of Solovyov, who is already called the fourth, after Nametkin, Sergeyev and Sokolov, investigator in the case of the murder of the royal family, about the solemn preparations for the burial of new remains in the Peter and Paul Cathedral? He showed him a newspaper with a huge headline, "INVESTIGATOR SOLOVYOV CLOSES THE ROMANOV'S CASE." Kumanin chuckled.

- Let them bury. Klimov will immediately pull out such documents that will cause a universal scandal of an unprecedented scale with very interesting consequences. I won't be at all surprised if I find out that all these "grave-diggers" are acting according to a scenario developed by Klimov's subordinates.

- You're not exaggerating? I ask with some hesitation.

Instead of answering, he opened his desk drawer, pulled out an old postcard-sized photograph, and handed it to me.

I caught my breath.

- Where did you get it from? - I ask a tactless and stupid question.

"You need to know the places," the ex-major smiles. - Do you want to publish?

"Why don't you do it yourself?" I ask, but I myself think: "If Kumanin has such materials, then what can General Klimov have at his disposal?"

- I'm the one. - Kumanin twists his finger around his forehead - officially I am considered a fool, I can compromise any publication. And laughs again.

I understand how much more he could tell me and did not tell! I'm trying to find out where he works now.

"Ishach is a legal adviser in one office," he said.

What happened to your father in the end? I ask another question.

"Don't ask," he grimaces, "I don't want to talk about this topic.

But is he alive? I keep asking.

"Alive," Kumanin says reluctantly and adds, "but not much. We are silent for a while.

— And Nadya Shestakova?

- Nadia? Kumanin asks. - she is all right. She married Theophilus. They have a child. Thrive. They have already been in the USA, in Israel and somewhere else, at scientific

symposiums speak, write.

- Do you communicate with her? I ask, but I see the answer in Kumanin's face.

"I tried it," he sighs, "but Nadia threw a tantrum at me that I, they say, almost killed them both. I didn't go into details - I didn't ruin it, and that's good.

Do you meet with your ex-colleagues? I continue the interrogation.

"Rarely," he admits. - They call sometimes, but they are only interested in health. I was invited to join the Veterans Society. I haven't matured yet.

Kumanin smiles, but not very happily.

What about your subordinates? I smile. - "Memory" and other organizations? They don't call you to be their leader?

Kumanin lowers his voice:

- No. I'm over it. After that meeting at the cemetery, I don't want to contact them anymore. If there are such brave ones, then the flag is in their hands.

- Well, I agree, trying to change the subject, - and Alyosha Lisitsyn? Did you manage to find out anything about him?

"He's gone," Kumanin answered simply, sighing.

- Died, right?

I can see from Kumanin's eyes that he no longer believes in my authorship of the translation of The Trojan horse."

"He came," explains Kumanin, "but not to stay. He came to say and leave. But only our country is such that only General Klimov heard everything he said.

- You know, - Sergey suddenly lowers his voice, - I'm always afraid that he will come to me again. will declare...

"Nonsense," I reassure him, "you then lost consciousness. Here you are in delirium all this and imagined.

- Nonsense? he asks. "Here, look. When I was discharged from the hospital in Leningrad, they gave me my things. The money, however, is gone. I had vacation pay, 700 rubles, I think. And everything else is in place: documents, a fountain pen, a razor, a toothbrush and... these black glasses that I tore off Ahriman.

He shows eye-catching black goggles with elastic bands used by welders.

"Yes," I say, confused, not daring to touch my glasses. - I don't even know what and say.

"Well," Kumanin suddenly objected, "you can't say anything if you translated The Trojan Horse?" Everything is said and written there. Remember what John Kill wrote about the so-called ultra-beings. So he may well come back for points.

And I remember the words of John Keel: "As soon as you begin any study of the mysterious events of the distant and even not very distant past,

some unknown forces, the nature of which can only be guessed at. On the one hand, these forces do their best to get you on target, and on the other hand, they make no less effort to make you go crazy.”

November 1994 - February 1995, St. Petersburg

Notes

1

The report was written by a KGB major in 1989, and therefore, constantly referring to foreign sources, he emphasized that he was not expressing his own opinion, thereby protecting himself from possible dissatisfaction with the command.